

This of 49.5 gigatons of carbon dioxide

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This month, the U. S Department of Interior proposed an ambitious plan to open federal offshore waters to drilling and fracking within the next 5 years. The plan has been publicly opposed by the governors of California, New Jersey, Oregon, Delaware, Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, Washington, and South Carolina. The Center for Biological Diversity estimates that the opening of these leases could potentially lead to with the release of 49.

5 gigatons of carbon dioxide and pollution into the environment, which would threaten delicate biodiverse ecosystems, harm fisheries, and inhibit the tourist economy. Most people remember the Deepwater Horizon oil rig that exploded in 2010 killing 11 people spewing enough crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico to wipe out thousands of marine animals. If the plan is adopted it would create a financial bonus for the oil and gas industry and drastically change current energy policies that have been in effect for over 30 years. It would also overturn a permanent ban on drilling in the Atlantic continental shelf that was issued by Obama in the latter part of 2016. The Trump administration is also considering allowing seismic testing that is so loud it can drown out whale songs. Lawsuits are certain to follow. The state of California and the Center for Biological Diversity have already filed a challenge to the pending approval by the federal government. Even though full production would be 10 to 15 years away, the urgency to intervene now is critical.

The further along the acceptance of the proposal gets, the harder it is to reverse. Because fracking has been so successful in boosting oil and gas production, it is used more frequently than ever before. The process is

toxic and involves using high pressured water to extract natural gasses from the earth.

The water is mixed with “ fracking fluids” that are unknown and unregulated. After the process, the water is extremely polluted and dumped into waste wells and aquifers. Out of the 280 billion gallons of water required to carry out the process, six to seven percent of that water leaks out into the surrounding environment. This equals about 9 billion gallons of contaminated water containing unknown toxins heavy metals into local watersheds each year. Most experts agree that the costs of fracking far out way the benefits of becoming the world’s dominant energy producer. More than 16 cities in California alone have adopted resolutions opposing new drilling and fracking of existing offshore wells.

California already has 43 oil wells located off its coast, along with hundreds of miles of gas and oil pipelines. Residents, environmental groups, and companies all over the nation have pledged to defeat local drilling in court. It will take about a year for the Department of the Interior to issue a final plan detailing the auctions and lease sales that will be offered. At that time, Congress will be allowed 60 days to review any new lease plan.

Seven of the areas offered for leasing are located in the Pacific, just off California. Drilling has been banned there since the oil spill near Santa Barbara in 1969. Hopefully, with enough pressure from environmentally conscious individuals and organizations, these changes will halt and our environment will be protected.