**Despite Coastal Opposition, Trump Administration Aims to Open Atlantic to Offshore Drilling**

*Review Sets Stage to Reverse Previous Decisions Despite Overwhelming Opposition from the Coast*

**Washington, D.C.** – The Southern Environmental Law Center released the following statement after the Department of Interior announced plans to reconsider offshore drilling leases off the Atlantic Coast, despite fervent opposition from coastal communities.

“This so-called review is a slap in the face to the millions of coastal residents who strongly rejected the idea of offshore drilling. The Trump Administration has turned its back on Southeastern coastal communities with this renewed attempt to force offshore drilling into a region that doesn’t want it,” **said Sierra Weaver, senior attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center**. “We just studied this issue for two years, and now they say they need to take another look. This proposal seeks to put the interests of the oil and gas industry over coastal residents and jeopardizes the vibrant tourism and fishing industries that support our economy. Coastal communities made it clear to the last president that they don’t want offshore drilling, and they’ll do the same with this president.”

More than 120 coastal cities and towns from New Jersey to Florida—including major Southeastern cities at risk like Wilmington, Myrtle Beach, Charleston, and Savannah—have passed resolutions against Atlantic drilling and seismic testing. Hundreds of businesses, trade groups, and tourism associations also oppose it.

Last March, this opposition convinced the Obama Administration to scrap a controversial plan to open the coasts of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia to industrial oil and gas exploration for the first time, a move that would dramatically change coastal communities and jeopardize coastal economies. The Southeast coast is built around a thriving tourism industry that attracts visitors from around the world to the pristine beaches, picturesque coastal communities, and beautiful waters that could be devastated with a single major oil spill. Even without a catastrophic accident, the industrialization and infrastructure associated with drilling—the rigs, refineries, pipelines, and traffic—would irreparably change coastal communities and the thriving tourism economy.

A 2015 report from the Center for the Blue Economy showed that the oil and gas industry’s promises of revenue and jobs were greatly exaggerated—and far surpassed by the existing Southeastern tourism and fishing jobs that would be jeopardized if drilling moves forward. Key findings include:

* Ocean-based jobs and businesses are the backbone of economies along the Southeastern coast – from resorts to commercial fishing, from ocean recreation to restaurants.
* In 2012, there were nearly 250,000 ocean-related jobs in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, and the ocean economy contributed $14.6 billion to the economies in the region. The ocean economy provided more than $7.5 billion in wages in the same year.
* The tourism and recreation sector alone supported more than 170,000 jobs and contributed more than $6 billion to the regional economy. The commercial fishing industry contributed nearly $1 billion to the region.
* The ocean economy accounts for as much as 17-30 percent of total employment in some counties, including the counties that are home to the Outer Banks, Myrtle Beach, and the Hampton Roads area.

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*The Southern Environmental Law Center is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. With nine offices across the region (Charlottesville, VA; Chapel Hill, NC; Atlanta, GA; Charleston, SC; Washington, DC; Birmingham, AL; Nashville, TN; Asheville, NC; and Richmond, VA), SELC is widely recognized as the Southeast’s foremost environmental organization and regional leader. SELC works on a full range of environmental issues to protect the South’s natural resources and the health and well-being of all the people in our region.*[www.SouthernEnvironment.org](http://www.southernenvironment.org/" \t "_blank)