

In Seattle, 'kayaktivists' take on Arctic oil drilling

May 7 2015, byPhuong Le



In this photo taken April 16, 2015, a group of kayakers rafted together work to pull up a protest sign as they practice for an upcoming demonstration against Arctic oil drilling, in Elliott Bay in view of downtown Seattle. Royal Dutch Shell wants to park two massive Arctic oil drilling rigs in Seattle's waterfront, but the petrochemical giant will have to get around protesters in kayaks and a mayor determined to take on climate change. The fast-approaching battle with so-called kayaktivists is unfolding in a city well known for embracing progressive causes, laying bare the high-stakes feud over oil exploration in the icy waters off Alaska. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

Royal Dutch Shell wants to park two massive Arctic oil drilling rigs in Seattle's waterfront—but the petroleum giant will have to get around

protesters in kayaks and a mayor determined to take on climate change.

The fast-approaching battle with so-called kayaktivists is unfolding in a city well known for embracing environmental causes, laying bare the high-stakes feud over [oil](#) exploration in the icy waters off Alaska.

Seattle Mayor Ed Murray took up the cause Monday, choosing a renewable-energy group's breakfast to announce that the Port of Seattle, a public agency that operates one of the nation's busiest seaports, must get a new permit before it could host Shell's drilling fleet. That could potentially thwart the company's plans here—although Shell says it is closely watching events and did not expect delays.

The mayor urged the port to reconsider its two-year, \$13 million lease with Foss Maritime, a company that has been in Seattle for more than a century and whose client is Shell.

"This is an opportunity for the port and all of us to make a bold statement about how oil companies contribute to climate change, oil spills and other environmental disasters - and reject this short-term lease," Murray said in a statement.

Shell wants to drill this summer in the Chukchi Sea off Alaska's northwest coast to determine whether there are commercial quantities of oil and gas. Arctic offshore reserves are estimated at 26 billion barrels of recoverable oil and 130 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, according to U.S. Geological Survey estimates.

Efforts to block Shell sent chills through the business community, prompting warnings that such regulatory uncertainty could threaten Seattle's working port and jobs.



Ships sit moored at Seattle's Terminal 5, including the Shell support vessel Aiviq, center, where Royal Dutch Shell wants to park two massive Arctic oil drilling rigs, Wednesday, May 6, 2015, in Seattle. A fast-approaching battle with so-called kayaktivists is unfolding in a city well known for embracing progressive causes, laying bare the high-stakes feud over oil exploration in the icy waters off Alaska. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

The local maritime sector, including ship builders, cargo vessels and tug companies, provides more than 22,000 jobs and contributes \$2.1 billion to the local economy, according to city figures.

"For Seattle to remain a thriving and viable maritime city, it cannot continue to set a hostile tone and environment toward our port and maritime sector," Joshua Berger, coordinator of the Washington Maritime Federation, said in a statement.

Jordan Royer, vice president for external affairs of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, added: "They're not drilling in Elliott Bay, they're just parking there."

Curtis Smith, a Shell spokesman, said the company used Seattle's private shipyards in 2012 to refurbish a drill rig and do other work. "Seattle continues to make logistical sense," because of its deep-water port, loading spaces and workforce, he said, adding that Puget Sound has long been a major staging ground for the Alaska oil industry.

Environmental activists say they relish the chance to make a public statement against fossil fuels dependence and global warming.

"Having a company like Shell trying to do its work in Seattle is a great opportunity to point out how destructive and pernicious the industry is," said Eric de Place, policy director for Sightline Institute, a Seattle-based think tank that has opposed a number of coal-export and crude oil terminals proposed in the Northwest.



In this April 17, 2015, file photo, with the Olympic Mountains in the background, a small boat crosses in front of an oil drilling rig as it arrives in Port

Angeles, Wash., aboard a transport ship after traveling across the Pacific. Royal Dutch Shell hopes to use the rig for exploratory drilling during the summer open-water season in the Chukchi Sea off Alaska's northwest coast, if it can get the permits. (Daniella Beccaria/seattlepi.com via AP, File)

Drilling opponents will have an enormous visual aid—the 400-foot long Polar Pioneer—parked against Seattle's picturesque skyline to drive home their point, said Emily Johnston, with 350 Seattle, a group helping to organize events to protest Shell. The rig is now in Port Angeles, Washington, but will head to Seattle sometime in the coming weeks.

"The rigs have become a proxy for everything that is wrong with the recklessness of fossil fuel companies," Johnston said. "If I were them, I would never have tried to bring that monstrous thing to Seattle."

Less than a mile from Terminal 5, where Shell's drilling fleet will be moored, kayakers have been practicing flips and rescues, in case the water-based protest turns dangerous.



In this photo taken April 16, 2015, kayakers raft together as they practice for an upcoming demonstration against Arctic oil drilling, in Elliott Bay in Seattle. Royal Dutch Shell wants to park two massive Arctic oil drilling rigs in Seattle's waterfront, but the petrochemical giant will have to get around protesters in kayaks and a mayor determined to take on climate change. The fast-approaching battle with so-called kayaktivists is unfolding in a city well known for embracing progressive causes, laying bare the high-stakes feud over oil exploration in the icy waters off Alaska. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

They plan to converge by land and in kayaks during a three-day "festival of resistance" starting May 16. The demonstration has been dubbed the "Paddle in Seattle," reminiscent of 1999 when thousands of protesters converged in Seattle during the WTO meetings, with some taking part in what became known as "the Battle in Seattle."

Once the rigs are here, some say they will do what they can to prevent the fleet from leaving to explore for oil this summer.

"We're going to be there shaking our paddles at Shell," said Carlo Voli, 49, a kayaker who has been training in recent weeks. "When they try and depart, that's when we will put our kayaks and bodies on the line and not allow them to leave."



In this photo taken April 16, 2015, a woman and two children walk past as kayakers below practice for an upcoming demonstration against Arctic oil drilling, in Elliott Bay in Seattle. Royal Dutch Shell wants to park two massive Arctic oil drilling rigs in Seattle's waterfront, but the petrochemical giant will have to get around protesters in kayaks and a mayor determined to take on climate change. The fast-approaching battle with so-called kayaktivists is unfolding in a city well known for embracing progressive causes, laying bare the high-stakes feud over oil exploration in the icy waters off Alaska. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)



In this photo taken April 16, 2015, kayakers look on as an instructor explains how to get out of a boat if it flips over as they practice for an upcoming demonstration against Arctic oil drilling, in adjacent Elliott Bay in Seattle. Royal Dutch Shell wants to park two massive Arctic oil drilling rigs in Seattle's waterfront, but the petrochemical giant will have to get around protesters in kayaks and a mayor determined to take on climate change. The fast-approaching battle with so-called kayaktivists is unfolding in a city well known for embracing progressive causes, laying bare the high-stakes feud over oil exploration in the icy waters off Alaska. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)



In this photo taken April 16, 2015, kayaker Becky Berryhill, second right, lets out a laugh as she sets out on a training session with Matt Bingham and others as they practice for an upcoming demonstration against Arctic oil drilling, in Elliott Bay in Seattle. Royal Dutch Shell wants to park two massive Arctic oil drilling rigs in Seattle's waterfront, but the petrochemical giant will have to get around protesters in kayaks and a mayor determined to take on climate change. The fast-approaching battle with so-called kayaktivists is unfolding in a city well known for embracing progressive causes, laying bare the high-stakes feud over oil exploration in the icy waters off Alaska. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

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