

Shell Arctic exploration conditional approval "a backward move": WWF

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Pacific walrus (*Odobenus rosmarus divergens*), Alaska, United States. Credit: Kevin Schafer / WWF-Canon

In what WWF-US has termed "a backward move" the US government has given conditional approval to Royal Dutch Shell to conduct exploratory drilling for oil in the Chukchi Sea in America's Arctic

ocean.

WWF strongly opposed this decision and over the past several months has shared voices of concern with the government from more than 100,000 supporters. The [drilling](#) site is 70 miles from the shore of Alaska, and 1000 miles away from the nearest US Coast Guard station. In the event of an accident, detecting and containing spilled oil in broken ice, summer fog, and rough sea conditions, could be impossible.

"Today's decision to move closer to allowing fossil fuel extraction from the Chukchi Sea - home to majestic wildlife and a place where extreme weather, gale force winds and rough seas make operations and response to spills extremely difficult - is a backward move at this time," said Margaret Williams, managing director of WWF-US Arctic programmes.

"Without proven technologies to clean up potential spills, [offshore drilling](#) is too great a risk to America's Arctic. We have so many better energy choices, including promising technologies that provide clean ways to power our lives without harming the planet."

The US Government agency that made the decision to approve the drilling permit did so despite their own estimates of a 75-percent chance of one or more spills of more than 1,000 barrels of oil into this pristine region during the lifetime of the lease, from exploration to development. The impacts from spills could be irreversible – for wildlife and people.

In addition, in April it was reported that one of Shell's Arctic drilling rigs, due in Puget Sound in May failed a Coast Guard inspection of some of its pollution control equipment.

Shell still needs to receive other authorizations as they relate to the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act, in order to go forward with drilling six wells in the Chukchi Sea this

summer as this is also home to polar bears, walrus, beluga and bowhead whales, and diverse seabird populations.

In January of 2013 the world was again reminded of the risks from offshore oil operations. At that time, Shell lost control of its drilling rig while towing it from Alaska to Seattle for maintenance and the rig grounded on a pristine island in the Gulf of Alaska.

In a region where temperatures are rising twice as fast than ever before, and sea ice and snow is melting at record levels, it is critical the US take decisive action to cut carbon pollution to reduce the impacts of climate change. This approach is also supported by new scientific analysis that found the most efficient way of meeting the world's most prominent climate goal, of holding global warming to less than 2o C, would involve ending all Arctic oil drilling plans.

The decision to issue the permits comes on the heels of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry taking over as the incoming Arctic Council chairman. During this two-year chairmanship the U.S. will focus on ocean stewardship, improving economic and living conditions for Arctic residents, and climate change. Given these US priorities, WWF sees the decision to allow Shell to move forward as a contradiction to the nation's overarching goals in the Arctic.

Provided by WWF

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