

Atlantic drilling off table but survey permits pending

March 29 2016, by Bruce Smith

While drilling for oil and natural gas in the Atlantic is off the table for now, permits are still pending that could allow seismic surveys to map just how much might be out there.

The Obama administration announced earlier this month that the Atlantic will not be included in the next round of offshore energy leases from 2017 through 2022.

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said the decision was based in part on local opposition. Dozens of coastal communities passed resolutions opposing offshore drilling worried that oil spills could hurt fisheries and tourism.

Two years ago, however, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management opened areas in the Atlantic to energy surveys and eight companies currently have pending applications to use seismic air guns to map the ocean floor.

Environmental groups worry the loud sounds from the air guns will harm marine life such as whales and turtles.

The advocacy group Oceana released maps Tuesday showing areas where permits are being sought and where they overlap crucial marine habitat. Almost 40 fishermen and others who make their living on the waters off Delaware, Maryland and Virginia also sent a letter to the governors of the three states.

"Allowing seismic blasting could disrupt the spawning, feeding and migration patterns that support our fisheries and replenish fish populations from year to year," the letter warned.

Seismic air guns are already in use in the Gulf of Mexico, off Alaska and other places worldwide. They are towed behind boats and send strong pulses of sound into the ocean every few seconds. The sounds bounce back and are translated by computers into high resolution, three-dimensional images.

Although there will be no immediate Atlantic drilling "our applicants are going to work through the process" of getting permits, said Gail Adams, a spokeswoman for the International Association of Geophysical Contractors, an exploration industry trade group.

Estimates of Atlantic energy reserves are based on decades-old surveys and "the government still needs updated information acquired and processed through the latest technology" she said, adding seismic surveying has been done safely in other areas of the world.

But Claire Douglass of Oceana disagreed.

"With offshore drilling off the table in the Atlantic, there is absolutely no reason to risk the damage that would be caused by unnecessary seismic air gun blasting in the region," she said in a statement.

Any permits issued by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management would have restrictions to protect sea life. They include, among others, microphones in the water to listen for nearby marine mammals, people on board ship watching for whales and closing areas to surveys during birthing and feeding seasons.

Current bureau figures estimate 4.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil in

federal waters from Florida to Maine. Oil lobbyists say drilling for that oil and [natural gas](#) could create thousands of jobs and pump almost \$24 billion a year into the economy during the next two decades.

© 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Atlantic drilling off table but survey permits pending (2016, March 29) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-atlantic-drilling-table-survey-pending.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--