

Obama U-turn on Atlantic drilling

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US President Barack Obama speaks during a cabinet meeting next to Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell at the White House in July 2014

President Barack Obama's administration on Tuesday signaled it was jettisoning plans to open swathes of the western Atlantic Ocean to oil and gas drilling, a U-turn that delighted environmentalist groups.

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell announced the move on Twitter, saying a new five-year plan "protects the Atlantic for future generations."

The administration in January announced plans to open drilling in the Atlantic along the East Coast, from Virginia to Georgia, even as it protected seas off Alaska's coast.

The Atlantic plan had faced fierce opposition from local and environmental groups. They warmly welcomed the reversal.

"If it's true, President Obama has taken a giant step for our oceans, for coastal economies and for mitigating climate change," said Dustin Cranor of Oceana, a pressure group.

The fossil-fuel industry appeared to pre-empt the announcement with a message on Monday in support of off-shore drilling.

"Allowing more offshore oil and natural gas development is one of the best ways policymakers can grow the economy, strengthen our energy security and raise more revenue for competing priorities—from education to infrastructure and conservation," said Erik Milito, director of upstream and industry operations for the American Petroleum Institute.

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