

Trump said to advance seismic tests for oil in Atlantic waters

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The Trump administration is taking a major step toward allowing a first-in-a-generation seismic search for oil and gas under Atlantic waters, despite protests that the geological tests involve loud air gun blasts that

will harm whales, dolphins and other animals.

The National Marine Fisheries Service is set to issue "incidental harassment authorizations" allowing seismic surveys proposed by five companies that permit them to disturb marine mammals that are otherwise protected by federal law, according to three people familiar with the activity who asked not to be named before a formal announcement.

The firms—including TGS-NOPEC Geophysical Co. ASA and Schlumberger Ltd. subsidiary WesternGeco Ltd. - still must win individual permits from the Interior Department's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management before they can conduct the work, but those are widely expected under President Donald Trump, who has made "energy dominance" a signature goal.

The seismic surveys to identify oil and gas reserves could be conducted in Atlantic Ocean waters along the U.S. East Coast, from Delaware to central Florida.

The research involves periodic blasts from compressed air guns, which send out [sound waves](#) that penetrate the sea floor. When the sound waves bounce back, they are captured by sensors towed behind seismic vessels. The resulting data is used to produce detailed, three-dimensional maps of underground geological features.

Conservationists say the blasts are so loud they jeopardize the hearing of dolphins, cause whales to beach themselves and disrupt animals' mating and feeding habits. Scientists have warned that the surveys could cause long-lasting damage to marine animals, including the critically endangered North Atlantic Right Whale.

If ultimately approved, the surveys will mark another Trump

administration reversal of an Obama-era decision in the name of energy priorities. The Obama administration denied pending seismic applications in January 2017.

Trump sought to streamline government permitting of seismic surveys in an April 2017 executive order. Within days, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke had issued an order resuming evaluation of seismic permit applications.

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