



## RCC Statement on the Biden Administration's Proposed Final Five-Year Plan for Oil and Gas Offshore Drilling

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Today, the Biden Administration approved a Proposed Final National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2023-2028 (henceforth referred to as the "Five-Year Plan") with three new leases sanctioned in the Gulf of Mexico. The approval of these leases cements a stark discrepancy between the Administration's current stance and the only responsible number of leases that it had a duty to approve: zero.

The proposed final Five-Year Plan's release arrived at the heels of over a year of advocacy by grassroots organizations and frontline communities for an absolute end to offshore drilling for oil and gas in federal waters. It is the responsibility of the Department of Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management BOEM to produce and finalize a Five-Year Plan that commits the government to selling a discretionary quantity of drilling leases periodically at the obligation of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act. In a concession to fossil fuel champion Joe Manchin, the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act contained stipulations that tied offshore wind development to leasing for offshore oil drilling, creating a tricky situation for the Administration which needed to pass a popular, bipartisan legislative package. Regardless of the complexity, the Administration is responsible for safeguarding our oceans and environment from calamitous emissions increases, which these leases will beget. Additionally, the President has yet to throw his weight behind July's Nonrestrictive Offshore Wind (NOW) Act, which would eliminate the provision in the IRA that coupled offshore oil and gas lease sales with offshore wind development.

In collaboration with the Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, President Biden and his Administration could have used this opportunity to close the door on fossil fuel exploration in our oceans once and for all. Instead, the Administration is willing to prolong the United States' role in exacerbating the climate crisis, endangering wildlife and frontline communities, and jeopardizing both his legacy of climate leadership and his chances at reelection in 2024.

The most disheartening feature of President Biden's newly approved Five-Year Plan is the guaranteed increase in carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions provided by these lease sales. Amid a global reckoning with developed countries', especially the United States' role in emissions contributions to extreme climate change, it is deeply disappointing that the Administration would not do everything in its power to eliminate the possibility of new fossil fuel infrastructure expansion. With this Five-Year Plan, President Biden has sent the message that there is a price tag on our oceans, on our and our grandchildren's livable futures, on breathing clean



air, and on public health. The very culprits of this generation-defining catastrophe, oil giants like Chevron, Exxon, and Shell, will now continue to enjoy the privilege of cashing in on the economic boon and environmental death sentence that is continued drilling into the ocean floor for the next five years – a time frame critical to preventing the most irreversible consequences of a rapidly heating planet. Scientists, the youth, and the general public agree that if we do not implement “immediate and deep emissions reductions across all sectors” we will sacrifice our chance of preventing the passage of the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold in the next decade, virtually crystallizing a future of chaos.

The construction that follows three new oil and gas lease sales will have innumerable environmental consequences in the Gulf of Mexico. While Republicans have recently taken (scientifically unfounded) [umbrage](#) with the risk offshore wind construction poses to marine wildlife, the real ecological harm wrought by offshore drilling is due to the construction of oil rigs, not wind farms. Populations of sea birds, whales, dolphins, and vegetation on the ocean floor are [severely disrupted](#) by every stage of the drilling process. In early exploratory phases, oil companies set off seismic explosions that can be heard from thousands of miles away. In construction, marine animals swim or fly into equipment, injuring themselves from blunt force, oil exposure, or burns. Marine life is displaced, injured, killed, or poisoned by offshore oil drilling activity. When marine life low on the food chain consumes the byproducts of drilling, including crude oil and hydraulic fluids, toxins bioaccumulate, or exponentially increase in concentration, as they are consumed by larger animals. The damage does not stop with apex predators, however. Entire communities, largely low-income, Black, and Indigenous citizens, in the Gulf will suffer from consumption of these fish and animals, amounting to major public health crises. The lifeblood of these communities’ economies – fishing, boating and recreation, and tourism industries – and their cultural connection to these waters are compromised by the possibility of contamination. The consequences of oil spills and toxicity in the food chain are not just dire but nearly guaranteed. Oil spills are not anomalous accidents but inevitable outcomes of a volatile and dangerous industry. Since the infamous 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill, the U.S. has seen over [5,000 oil spills](#) in our waters, introducing hundreds of millions of gallons of oil and metric tons of greenhouse gasses released into the oceans and atmosphere, respectively. This Five-Year Plan is a surefire jolt to our coasts and planet.

The final blow delivered by the finalized Five-Year Plan is the political implication of alienating President Biden’s voter base. Just last week, the President’s [disapproval ratings hit a peak of 56%](#). With the election just over a year away, it is disconcerting to see the leader once celebrated as a champion of the environment make a decision so profoundly detrimental and so completely misaligned with one of the election-defining policy areas: investment in the fossil fuel industry. Earlier this month, more than 75 thousand people took to the streets of New York City to demand the Administration 1) declare a climate emergency, 2) expeditiously phase down drilling on federal land and waters, and 3) halt all fossil fuel infrastructure. This Plan flies in the face of these demands as well as the general will of voters, for whom climate is a rapidly ascending election priority. Specifically, [nearly 1 million](#) people voiced their opposition to any new offshore oil and gas drilling. Biden needs all the support he can get and committing to decades of more emissions from fossil fuel infrastructure is not how to get it.

“President Biden’s leadership on the environment and addressing the climate crisis is one of the most important things that made him popular among voters and an effective statesman” said RCC CEO & President, Bob Musil. “Now more than at any point in history, we need the Administration to commit to progressive climate action, not hand outs to the fossil fuel industry.”

In a previous [statement](#) on the Biden Administration’s ocean climate policy, we identified weaknesses yet commended the President’s cumulative global leadership in advancing climate-forward policy and action. The approval of three new oil and gas leases in this plan, however, could serve as a sizable

weight dragging down that legacy. Opportunities to turn the tide are not out of reach yet. Secretary Haaland has a 60-day waiting period beginning today before she can approve the Proposed Final Program. Together, Secretary Haaland and President Biden can decide that the Administration will overturn this Proposed Five Year Plan and commit to ending offshore oil drilling, for the sake of the climate, coastal ecosystems and communities, and the state of democracy in the United States. Furthermore, President Biden and Democratic leadership can emphatically support the NOW Act and evade the debacle posed by wind-oil conditionality in the IRA. Finally, the Administration can vow from now through the end of the presidency to adopt the rallying cries of the tens of thousands who mobilized in New York City and the millions more who will vote with their demands in mind, and commit to ending fossil fuel expansion. They can make good on their goal of halving emissions by 2030, a goal that is off the table if this proposed plan is approved. With ecological collapse on the horizon, there is nowhere to go but forward with our climate policies.

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The Rachel Carson Council is the national environmental organization envisioned by Rachel Carson and founded in 1965. The RCC educates, organizes, and advocates for climate justice, environmental health, and the promotion of Carson's environmental ethic of empathy for all living creatures