

January 25, 2019

Testimony in Support of SB 256

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Submitted by: Jena Carter, Oregon Coast and Marine Director, The Nature Conservancy

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 256, a bill proposing to prohibit the Oregon Department of State Lands from leasing submerged and submersible lands within the territorial sea for oil, gas or sulfur exploration, development or production.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based and non-partisan conservation organization. Our mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. TNC was incorporated in Oregon in 1961, and today we have over 70,000 members. Our staff, based in communities across the state, work collaboratively with tribes, government agencies, elected officials, private landowners, businesses, and natural resource stakeholders to develop innovative solutions to the major challenges facing people and nature.

In 2018, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) proposed to open the Oregon and Washington planning area to new oil and gas leasing [see BOEM Draft Proposed Program (DDP) for the 2019-2024 Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program. Docket # BOEM-2017-0074]. In response, TNC submitted public comments on March 5, 2018 expressing our deep concerns about the environmental, socioeconomic and procedural aspects of the proposal.

Specifically, TNC expressed our opposition to oil and gas leasing in new OCS planning areas and called upon the BOEM to remove the Washington/Oregon planning area from consideration in the 2019-2024 DPP. The foundation of our request was based upon sound science, the economics of the region and local communities, the ecological resources at risk, and the lack of oil and gas resources. For the same reasons TNC opposed oil and gas leasing in the offshore federal waters, we also oppose future oil and gas development in Oregon's state waters.

We urge the Legislature to reinstate the moratorium on oil and gas leasing in Oregon's Territorial Sea and pass SB 256. The reasoning behind our support for SB 256 includes the following:

- TNC has been active for over five decades in protecting coastal and ocean resources in or adjacent to Oregon's Territorial Sea, and we are concerned that our significant investments – worth millions of dollars – would be irreparably impacted by oil and gas activities. Our

activities include: acquiring and/or managing special properties along the coast, including the iconic and frequently visited Cascade Head; restoring estuary habitats; and supporting activities that advance climate resiliency, improve fisheries management and support marine protected areas.

- Oregon's Territorial Sea is the source of income, cultural traditions, enjoyment and recreation for many people and industries. Commercial fisheries contributed \$544 million in personal income to the state in 2016, with an economic impact of more than \$2.1 billion (ODFW 2017). Approximately 1.5 million recreational angling trips were taken in our ocean, bays/estuaries and coastal rivers in 2014, contributing \$68.9 million in personal income for coastal communities. Coastal tourism and recreation along the Oregon coast is a powerhouse for jobs and revenue, generating \$1.9 billion in revenues and over 20,000 jobs.
- According to BOEM's assessments, there are few, if any, recoverable oil and gas resources offshore of Oregon and it is improbable that the benefits of an oil and gas proposal could outweigh the net social, ecological and economic cost of extraction.
- Oregon has engaged in a robust multi-year marine spatial planning process, which is acknowledged as the highest quality work currently available. Through this process, state agencies and their partners compiled existing data sets and generated new ones to identify high value habitats, ecologically important areas, and areas critical to existing ocean uses. The analyses show few, if any, places are available for industrial uses, such as oil and gas, and those that are available pose high risks to the marine ecosystem.
- Oregon is known for its hazardous seas. The rough seas and remote areas present unique and substantial challenges for responding to oil spills.
- There is strong state and local opposition to oil and gas activities as expressed through numerous mechanisms including HB 3613 (2012), Executive Order 18-28 and policies and resolutions by local communities including Gold Beach, Newport and Lincoln City.
- Critical data gaps need to be resolved prior to oil and gas activities, including: High resolution seafloor habitat mapping to identify sensitive habitats; scenario-based trade-off analysis of vulnerability of ecosystem services, species and habitats to oil spill impacts, and accompanying natural resource damage assessments; and socio-cultural and economic mapping of important areas for commercial, recreational and tribal fisheries and other uses.

Lastly, and importantly, Oregon is blessed with outstanding natural resources. Oregon's pristine and beautiful coastline spans 362 miles and is punctuated by headlands, rocky shores, sandy beaches, bays and estuaries, many of which are located at the mouths of coastal rivers. The entire coastal region has a high diversity of plants, wildlife, birds and fish.

Offshore, the Pacific Northwest marine waters teem with life, found on the ocean floor, in deep marine canyons, across the continental shelf and slope and throughout the water column. Our marine ecosystem is both diverse and productive, fueled by powerful upwelling and ocean currents that exist in only four other places on Earth and bring nutrient-rich waters to the surface. Over 1.4 million seabirds (Naughton et al 2007) nest and forage here, and major runs of anadromous fish including Chinook and coho salmon use this region. Fishermen's harvest of over 60 species of rockfish, 12 species of flatfish, Dungeness crab, 6 coastal pelagic species (e.g., market squid, anchovy), and highly migratory species (e.g., tuna) create a fishing industry with thousands of jobs. Coastal trawl surveys have identified 360 fish species and 540 invertebrate species in this region (NOAA 2017). Offshore waters also are habitat for 29 species of marine mammals including orca, gray and humpback whales.

The vibrant, productive ecology of this area has earned numerous protective designations, including National Wildlife Refuges and Oregon's Territorial Sea Plan Rocky Shores designations. Large areas of habitat such as canopy kelp, seagrass, rocky reefs and undersea banks and canyons are also conserved as Essential Fish Habitat and Habitats of Particular Concern (PFMC 2017).

Offshore oil and gas drilling and associated activities have the potential to adversely and severely impact the ecological and economic resources of Oregon's coast, particularly if a catastrophic event was to occur. Our region's marine ecosystem is unique and irreplaceable, as are the coastal communities that base their lives and livelihoods on our ocean. For these reasons, we support the passage of SB 256 and urge you to vote yes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

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## **Citations**

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