



# A Time to Drill?

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The Department of the Interior and President Trump recently announced plans to open the largest amount of offshore areas to oil exploration in the nation's history. This comes at a time when oil prices are relatively low due to high production levels, and eight years after the [Deepwater Horizon spill](#) off the coast of Louisiana that led to numerous deaths and an ongoing economic impact estimated at over \$8 billion. Such a move at this time reveals that the administration is primarily concerned about decreasing the United States' reliance upon foreign oil. Trump has called

for America's energy dominance, specifically in terms of fossil fuels. This move stands in stark contrast to the principles established by the [Paris Agreement on climate](#), signed by 173 countries, to work toward limiting the [world's temperature rise](#). This rise, associated with climate change, is caused in part by the burning of fossil fuels. The offshore oil decision is also out of step with decisions made by countries like Germany and India that have committed to all-electric vehicles as a means to reduce the burning of fossil fuels.

## Offshore Oil Drilling Unpopular Among Many Coastal States

A number of people, including state leaders, have called President Trump's focus on fossil fuels as problematic for the environment and for coastal state's economies. States like California, Florida and others along the coast are heavily reliant upon tourism to sustain jobs and the state's economy. The threat of oil spills – several of which have devastated beaches, wildlife, and fishing companies in the past several decades – is ever present. While the administration is positioning this move as good for business interests, some are pointing out that big oil companies stand to profit, while offshore oil drilling can wreak havoc on small and medium sized tourist and fishing businesses.



*Big Sur, "Pacific Ocean and Rocky California Coast." Library of Congress Photo*

Driven by such economic concerns, the governor of Florida, Rick Scott, recently petitioned the federal government to exempt Florida from the new offshore lease area. President Trump, who owns a tourist property in Florida (and other coastal states), agreed with Governor Scott, a fellow Republican, and granted an exception for Florida. This move prompted both hope and frustration among other coastal state leaders, like Congressman Adam Schiff from California, who wonder if their states might also avoid offshore oil drilling. The California Coastal Commission, created in 1976 to manage development along the coast, is strongly opposed to the federal lease proposal. Like it has in previous eras, the Coastal Commission is protesting the federal government's lease proposal. As Coastal Commission chairperson Dayna Bochco said "Nothing galvanizes bipartisan resistance in California like the threat of more offshore oil drilling." The commission's legislative director, Sarah Christie, anticipates that "from Crescent City to Imperial Beach, people are going to be protesting" new offshore oil drilling.

## The Case Against Offshore Drilling

Our nation relies heavily upon fossil fuels to run everything from cars and factories to the electricity in our homes. So, why is there opposition to offshore oil drilling?



The Coast  
is Special

Public sentiment often holds that particular landscapes should be off limits to industrial pursuits, especially coastal recreational areas.



It's Too  
Dangerous

Offshore oil drilling causes enormous and long-lasting environmental harm when accidents occur, like the Deepwater Horizon spill off the Louisiana coast.

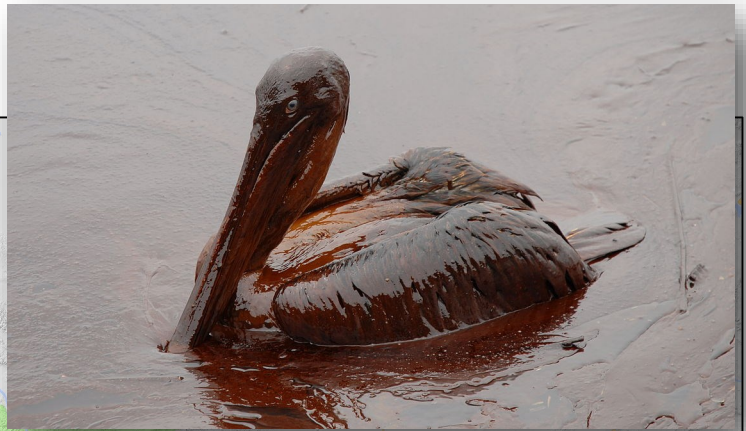


Climate  
Change

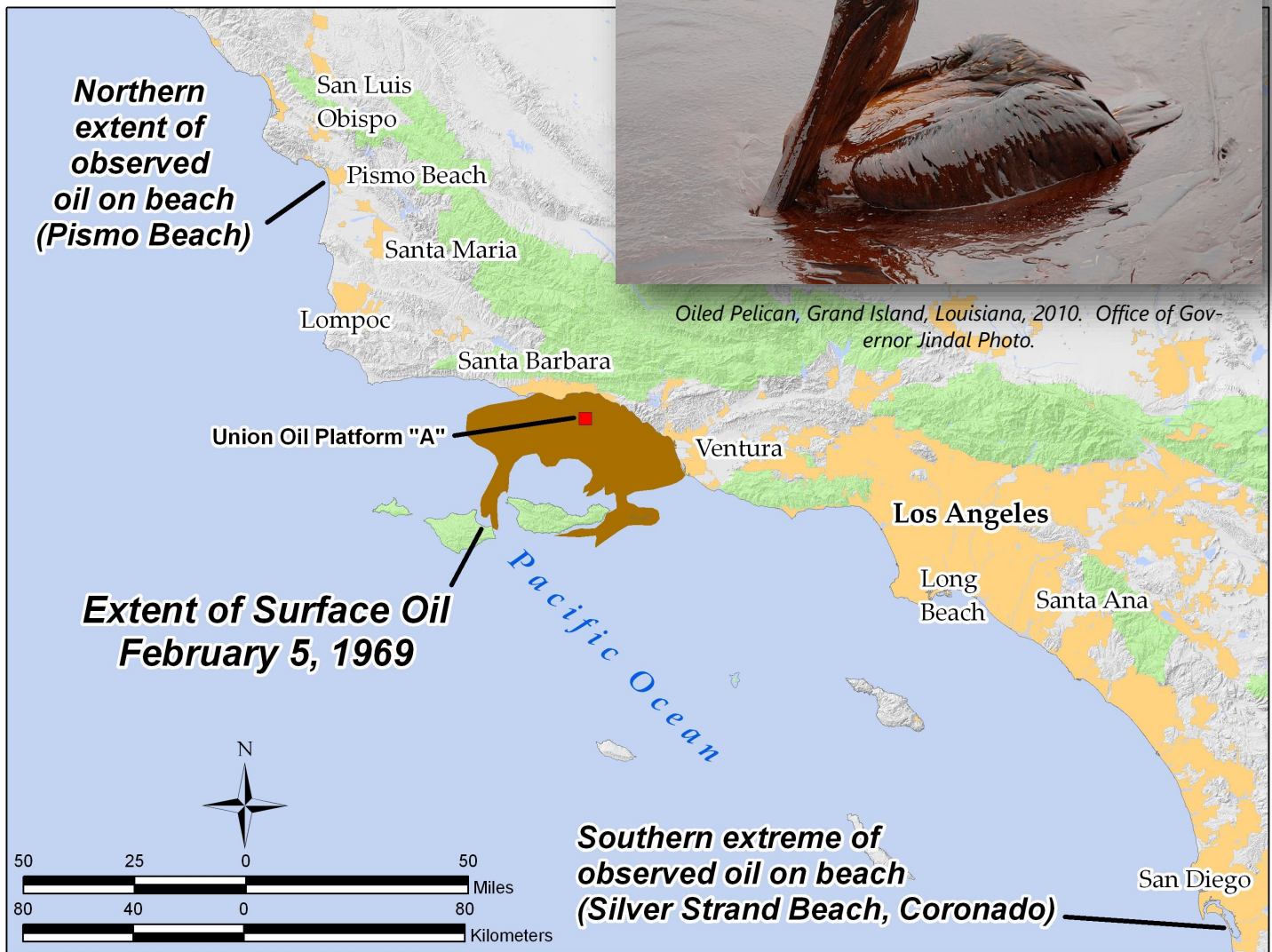
The Paris Agreement on climate change (like California legislation), calls for reducing reliance upon fossil fuels to slow down the warming of the planet. The United States' commitment to increased offshore oil drilling will make it harder to reach this goal.

An oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara in 1969 brought all of these types of concerns into focus. When 100,000 thousand barrels of oil spilled into the sea and onto the Santa Barbara coastline, California residents rallied to pass the Coastal Act, which in turn created the California Coastal Commission to oversee the careful use of the California Coast. National sentiment also turned toward environmental protection in this era, leading to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, and the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972. Several parts of the California coast were deemed too important for marine wildlife and/or too scenic, to allow offshore oil drilling. The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, which extends from

Marin to Cambria, was established in 1992 for the purpose of resource protection, research, education, and public use. There are thirteen such marine sanctuaries throughout the United States, which are estimated to generate approximately \$8 billion a year in local coastal and ocean dependent economies such as commercial fishing, research, and tourist based activities. So, to some extent, this current debate over offshore oil drilling is about what sectors of our economy to prioritize.



Oiled Pelican, Grand Island, Louisiana, 2010. Office of Governor Jindal Photo.



Santa Barbara County Planning and Development, Energy Division

## Fossil Fuels - A Political, Environmental, & Economic Issue

The United States relies on fossil fuels to meet approximately 80% of the nation's energy demand. Interior Secretary, Ryan Zinke, promotes offshore oil drilling as a means to "grow our nation's offshore energy industry, instead of slowly surrendering it to foreign shores." Though the United States supplies almost half of its own oil through U.S. production, reliance on oil from exporting countries like Saudi Arabia, Canada, and Venezuela, requires political agreements and alliances that are not always easy to sustain. Some of those who disagree with ramped up offshore oil drilling would prefer seeing the United States decrease its oil dependence by increasing the amount of non-fossil fuel based energy. There are certainly areas where a decreased reliance on fossil fuels can be quite successful, and transportation is one of them. Multiple countries, including some of the world's most populous, have [outlined their plans for phasing out all cars that run on oil](#) because the technology is there to support electric vehicles.

It is difficult to imagine a world without a reliance on fossil fuels for energy, as this has been the dominant form of energy since the nineteenth century. But there is a growing sense across the globe that it is time to re-think our approach to energy production so as to decrease the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that contribute to climate change. Most scientists agree that climate change, and the rising sea levels and severe weather events associated with it, will pose an increasingly serious threat to all people on Earth. Any conversation about offshore oil drilling will ultimately involve more than the economics of oil production and prices, but what the political and environmental implications are of the United States' increased commitment to fossil fuels.



"We want to grow our nation's offshore energy industry, instead of slowly surrendering it to foreign shores." - Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke

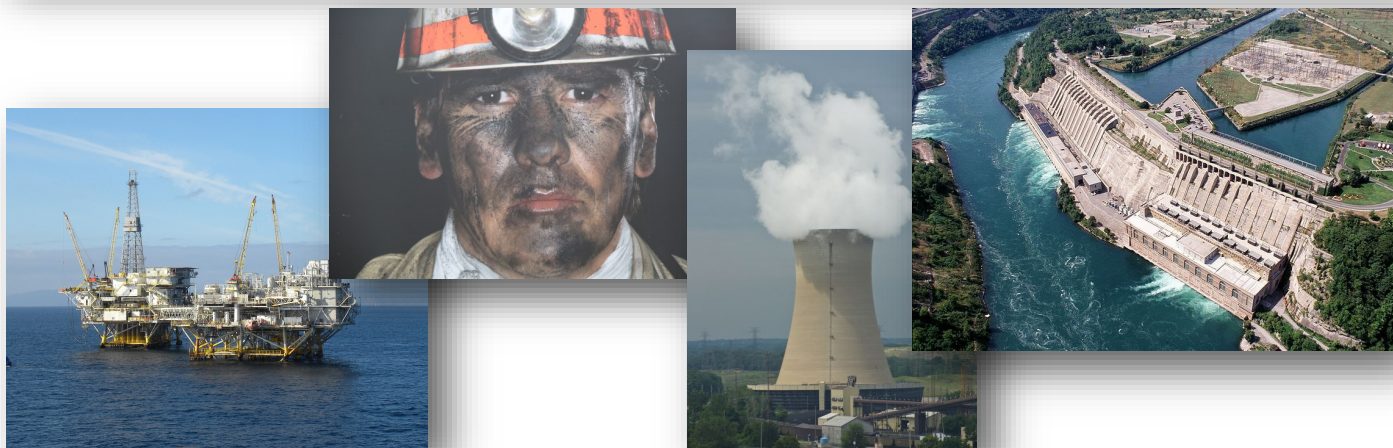
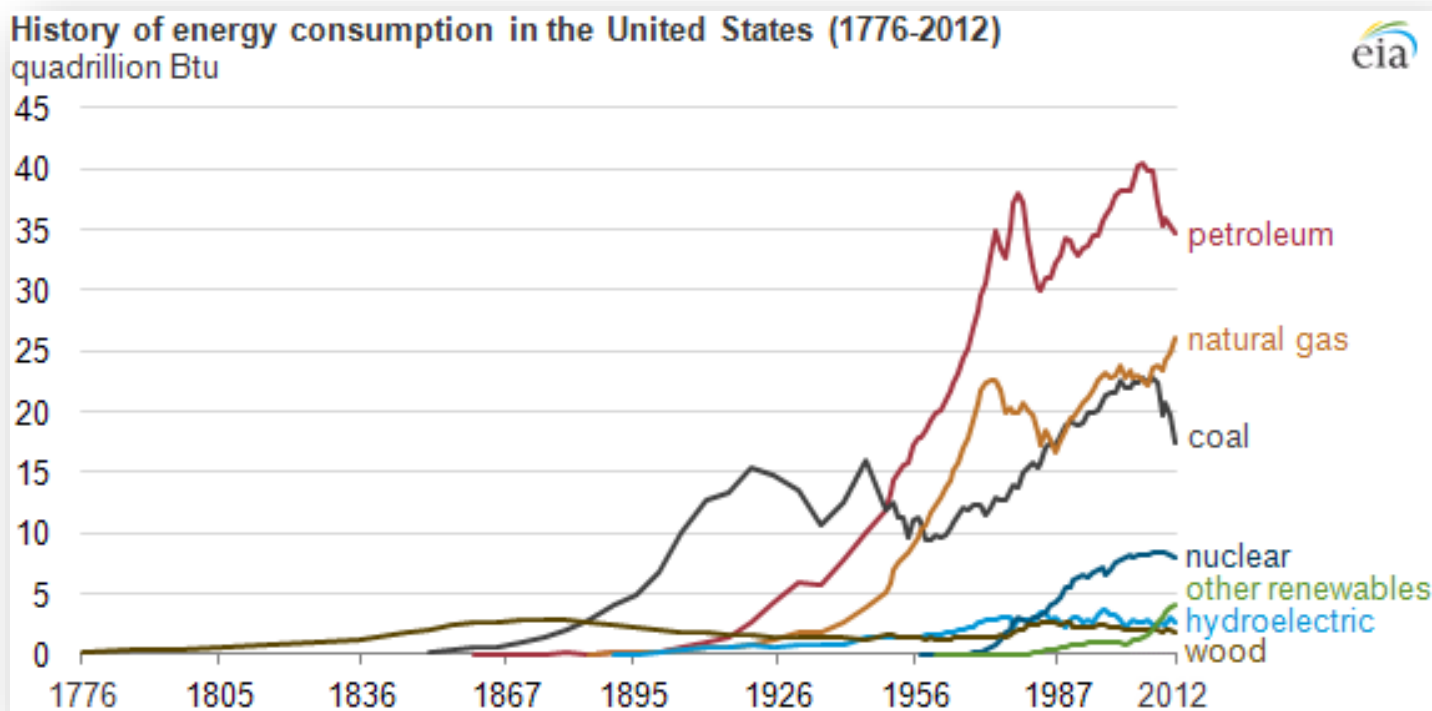
### What Happens Next?

Now that the federal government has made this proposal there is a period of public comment (from now until March 9), which will likely influence the scope and details of the new offshore oil regulations. Moreover, oil industries will have to see it as in their interest to make extremely expensive investments in new offshore drilling platforms, especially as onshore oil drilling is currently producing more oil than it has in many decades. Extracting more oil increases the supply, which generally results in lower prices – another deterrent for companies focused on profit margin. Meanwhile, the federal government can expect revenue from oil companies that pay for offshore oil leases, which helps offset the lost revenue from tax cuts.

## What Powers the US?

Consider the following chart detailing the history of energy consumption in the United States. Then, discuss the following:

1. What type of energy has been in use for the longest period of time in the U.S.? Why do you think that is?
2. When does energy usage in the United States first begin to rise rapidly? During what other time periods does energy consumption increase dramatically? What do you know about these time periods to explain the increase in energy consumption (consider factors of population, technologies, wealth).
3. What do you notice about the green line ("other renewables" such as solar and wind power) in comparison to the wood and hydroelectric (energy from moving water) sources? What does this tell you about the potential for harnessing an increasing amount of solar and wind power? What would we need in order to do so?



# TIMELINE

1896

First U.S. offshore oil drilling, near Santa Barbara California.

1953

Submerged Lands Act gives states the right to lease up to three nautical miles from the coast.

1953

Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act gives the federal government the authority to issue drilling leases in coastal areas beyond state jurisdiction, what became known as the Outer Continental Shelf.

1969

Union Oil Company oil spill slickened thirty miles of beach along the Santa Barbara coast. The 11-day spill released 80,000 barrels of oil.

1969

Following the Santa Barbara oil spill, President Richard Nixon (a Californian) called to a halt all drilling off the California coast, later opening only a small portion of the state's coastline to offshore oil drilling. By this time, most of the country's offshore oil drilling had shifted to the Gulf of Mexico.

1973-1974

The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries stopped selling oil to the United States for political reasons. Rising gas prices and a shortage of oil caused fears of dependence on foreign oil. Public interest began to move toward more offshore oil drilling.

1980

Oil spill off of Mexico's Bay of Campeche released 3.5 million barrels of oil.

1984

A U.S. Supreme Court Case – *Secretary of Interior v. California* – rejected the idea that a state could block federal offshore oil drilling leases. California argued against new federal lease proposals based on the 1972 federal Coastal Zone Management Act, which required federal agencies to conduct any of their activities “directly affecting the coastal zone” in keeping with state management plans, and the California Coastal Commission opposed offshore oil leases.



**Oil Production**



**Government / Legislation**



**Accidents**



1988

An offshore oil rig outside of Scotland caught fire and exploded, killing 167 workers.

1980s

New technology enabled oil companies to drill in much deeper water, where more oil could be found.

2010

Deepwater Horizon oil spill off the coast of Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico is the largest in history, polluting 1,100 miles of shoreline with 4.9 million barrels of oil, killing 11 people and countless wildlife, and causing severe damage to the fishing and tourist industries in the region.

2011

The Bureau of Offshore Energy Management, a government agency within the Department of the Interior, is formed to manage the development of U.S. Outer Continental Shelf energy and mineral resources in an environmentally and economically responsible way.

● Oil Production   ● Government / Legislation   ● Accidents



# The Deepwater Horizon

On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon Oil Rig exploded, approximately 40 miles off the coast of Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico. The explosion and subsequent sinking of the oil rig is considered the largest marine oil spill in the world and the worst environmental disaster in American history. Of the 126 crew members on the rig when it exploded, eleven died and seventeen more were wounded. Experts estimate that 3.19 million barrels (more than 130 million gallons) of oil leaked into the Gulf. And although thousands of local, state, and federal emergency workers were marshalled to limit the environmental destruction of the Gulf Coast, more than 1000 miles of beaches were contaminated and countless numbers of sea creatures and coastal animals perished.



*Vessel crews respond to the Deepwater Horizon offshore drilling rig after an April 2010 explosion set it on fire and caused a massive oil spill. U.S. Coast Guard photo*

## The Spill's Impact on the Economy

**\$22.7 billion:** Estimated total loss for Gulf Coast tourism (2010-13)

**\$247 million:** Estimated total loss for Gulf Coast commercial fisheries (2010-13)

**22,000:** Estimated number of Gulf Coast jobs lost due to the disaster (2010-20)



Images clockwise from top left: 1) Black smoke billows from a controlled burn of surface oil during the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. US Coast Guard Photo. 2) Rear Adm. Paul Zukunft conducts an overflight of the Louisiana marshlands July 2, 2010. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Jonathan Lally. 3) Workers cleaning up beach during Deepwater Horizon event. National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety Photo. 4) Clouds of smoke billow up from controlled burns taking place in the Gulf of Mexico May 19, 2010. US Coast Guard Photo.

## **Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI) Connections** <http://www.californiaeei.org/>

A program of CalRecycle's Office of Education and the Environment, EEI lessons are designed to foster environmental literacy among California students.

10.3.3. [Growth of Population, Cities, and Demands](#), California Connections: "Los Angeles on the Move"

10.4.1. [New Imperialism: The Search for Natural Resources](#), California Connections: "Paving the Way for a Cleaner Tomorrow"

11.11.5. [Many Voices, Many Visions: Analyzing Contemporary Environmental Issues](#), Lesson 4, "Roots of Controversy" The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

11.8.6. [Postwar Industries and the Emerging Environmental Movement](#), Lesson 3, "Tracking the Postwar Industrial Boom" and Lesson 4, "Effects of the Postwar Boom"

12.3.1. [Government and the Economy: An Environmental Perspective](#), (Econ) Lesson 2, "Economic Benefits and Costs of Environmental Regulations" and Lesson 3, "Cap and Trade" and Lesson 4, "Fiscal Policy and the Environment"

12.2.2, 12.2.7. [Sustaining Economies and the Earth's Resources](#), (Econ) Lesson 5 "Regulating the Market"

12.2.2., 12.2.5 [This Land is Our Land](#), (Gov) Lesson 3 "So, You Want to Own a Gas Station"

12.7.6. [Making and Implementing Environmental Laws](#), (Gov) Lesson 1, "The Responsibilities of Government: Protecting the Environment and Public Health" and Lesson 2, "Government at Work: Cleanup at the Former Long Beach Naval Complex" (jurisdiction of local, state, and federal government) and Lesson 3, "Implementing Public Policy: Cleaning Up the Sulphur Bank Mercury Mine" and Lesson 4, "State Powers and Responsibilities" and Lesson 5, "Thinking 'Green': A New State Approach"

### **Images:**

Vessel crews respond to the Deepwater Horizon offshore drilling rig after an April 2010 explosion set it on fire and caused a massive oil spill. U.S. Coast Guard photo. <http://coastguard.dodlive.mil/2017/09/the-long-blue-line-the-coast-guards-environmental-protection-mission/>

Pacific Ocean and Rocky California Coast, 1980-2006, Library of Congress Photo. Carol Highsmith, Photographer. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011632017/>

Oiled Pelican, Grand Island, Louisiana, 2010. Office of Governor Jindal Photo. <https://flic.kr/p/87rwej>

1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill Map. *Santa Barbara County Planning and Development, Energy Division*. <http://www.sbcountyplanning.org/energy/information/1969blowout.asp>

Ryan Zinke, Secretary of the Interior Official Portrait. <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/bio/press-resources/zinke-official-photo-by-tami-heilemann.jpg>

Graph of energy sources, US Energy Information Administration. <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=11951>

Offshore Drilling Rig. Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement photo. <https://flic.kr/p/VZMQRc>

Controlled burn during the Deepwater Horizon explosion, 2010. US Coast Guard and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Photo. [http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2011/20110920\\_gulfplume.html](http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2011/20110920_gulfplume.html)

Rear Adm. Paul Zukunft conducts an overflight of the Louisiana marshlands July 2, 2010. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Jonathan Lally. <http://coastguard.dodlive.mil/2015/04/what-deepwater-horizon-taught-us-about-being-always-ready/>

Workers cleaning up beach during Deepwater Horizon event. National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety Photo, 2010. <https://flic.kr/p/ejDjee>.

Clouds of smoke billow up from controlled burns taking place in the Gulf of Mexico May 19, 2010. Department of De-

### ***Current Context: A Publication of the California History-Social Science Project***

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