

Secretary Salazar Details Strategy for Comprehensive Energy Plan on U.S. Outer Continental Shelf

Provides More Time for Public Comment: Incorporates Renewable Energy

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Saying he needed to restore order to a broken process, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced his strategy for developing an offshore energy plan that includes both conventional and renewable resources.

His strategy calls for extending the public comment period on a proposed 5-year plan for oil and gas development on the U.S. Outer Continental Shelf by 180 days, assembling a detailed report from Interior agencies on conventional and renewable offshore energy resources, holding four regional conferences to review these findings, and expediting renewable energy rulemaking for the Outer Continental Shelf.

“To establish an orderly process that allows us to make wise decisions based on sound information, we need to set aside the Bush Administration’s midnight timetable for its OCS drilling plan and create our own timeline,” Salazar said.

On Friday, January 16, its last business day in office, the Bush Administration proposed a new five year plan for offshore oil and gas leasing. The proposal was actually published in the *Federal Register* on January 21, the day after the new Administration took office.

The deadline for public comment that the Bush Administration established - March 23, 2009 – does not provide enough time for public review or for wise decisions on behalf of taxpayers, the Secretary said.

“The additional time we are providing will give states, stakeholders, and affected communities the opportunity to provide input on the future of our offshore areas,” he said. “The additional time will allow us to restore an orderly process to our offshore energy planning.”

Salazar said this evaluation of the proposed plan also needed better information about what resources may be available in the offshore areas. “In the biggest area that the Bush Administration’s draft OCS plan proposes for oil and gas drilling - the Atlantic seaboard, from Maine to Florida - our data on available resources is very thin, and what little we have is twenty to thirty years old,” he said. “We shouldn’t make decisions to sell off taxpayer resources based on old information.”

Salazar directed the United States Geological Survey, the Minerals Management Service, and other departmental scientists to assemble all the information available about the offshore resources – conventional and renewable – along with information about potential impacts. The report is due in 45 days.

Based on that report, the Department will then determine what areas need more information and create a plan for gathering that information. The Department of the Interior oversees more than 1.7 billion acres on the Outer Continental Shelf – an area roughly three fourths of the size of the entire United States.

“To gather the best ideas for how we accomplish the task of gathering the offshore information we need, I will convene four regional meetings in the 30 days after MMS and USGS publish their report,” Salazar said. “I will host one meeting in Alaska, one on the Pacific Coast, one on the Atlantic Coast, and one on the Gulf Coast.” Salazar will ask all interested parties for their recommendations on how to move ahead with a comprehensive offshore energy plan.

The Secretary also will build a framework for offshore renewable energy development, so that the Department can incorporate the significant potential for wind, wave, and ocean current energy into its offshore energy strategy. “The Bush Administration was so intent on opening new areas for oil and gas offshore that it torpedoed offshore renewable energy efforts,” Salazar said.

As a senator, Salazar helped to craft and pass the Energy Policy Act of 2005 which required Interior to move quickly and issue, within 9 months, rules and regulations to guide the development of offshore energy resources, such as wind, wave, and tidal power. It took three years for the Bush Administration to prepare a *proposed* rule for offshore renewable energy development. They left office without putting *any* final regulations in place because it was not their priority, Salazar said, notwithstanding the requirement of the law.

“I intend to issue a final rulemaking for offshore renewables in the coming months, so that potential developers know the rules of the road,” Salazar said. “This rulemaking will allow us to move from the ‘oil and gas only’ approach of the previous Administration to the comprehensive energy plan that we need.”

“We need a new, comprehensive energy plan that takes us to the new energy frontier and secures our energy independence,” Salazar said. “We must embrace President Obama’s vision of energy independence for the sake of our national security, our economic security, and our environmental security.”

By adding the 180 day extension to the original 60-day period, interested parties will have had a total of 240 days (8 months) to comment on the proposed plan. The current comment period opened on January 21, 2009.

Contact:

[Frank Quimby](#) (202) 208-6416

[MMS: Securing Ocean Energy & Economic Value for America](#)
[U.S. Department of the Interior](#)