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News Release

Secretary Salazar's Statement on Court Ruling Regarding 2007-2012 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar issued the following statement regarding the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruling on DOI's request for clarification of the Court's earlier decision to vacate the 2007-2012 Outer Continental Shelf oil and natural gas leasing program:

"I am pleased with the Court's decision. Consistent with the Department's request, the Court clarified that its prior ruling only applies to the Chukchi, Beaufort and Bering Seas. We are moving forward with the planned August 19th Gulf of Mexico lease sale."

"President Obama has made clear that a comprehensive energy plan that reduces America's dependence on foreign oil must include domestic production and the Court's ruling allows us to move forward in a balanced way."

"With respect to the Arctic Ocean and Alaska, we will continue to work expeditiously to address the environmental issues identified by the Court in the existing 2007-2012 5-year plan."

Background on OCS Court Case and Proposed Lease Sale

On April 17, 2009 the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit vacated the entire 2007-2012 Outer Continental Shelf oil and natural gas leasing program, ruling that Bush Administration officials did not conduct sufficient scientific and environmental analysis before scheduling oil and gas lease sales on the Outer Continental Shelf off Alaska. The ruling came two years after lease sales had begun under the 2007-2012 OCS oil and natural gas leasing program.

On May 11, 2009 Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar asked the Department of Justice to seek clarification from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit on the scope of its decision.

"The previous Administration's failure to apply the law has resulted in widespread uncertainty in the oil and gas industry and put reliable conventional energy production from offshore areas in jeopardy," Salazar said at that time. "We must fix the problems the court identified and put oil and gas leasing decisions back on firm scientific footing."

On July 28, 2009, the court clarified that its ruling only applies to the Chukchi, Beaufort, and Bering Seas. As a result of yesterday's ruling, the Department will provide the court with periodic reports on the progress of its review of the existing 5-year plan to ensure that it properly balances environmental concerns with the nation's energy needs.