



Biden issues limits on oil drilling in Alaska, Arctic Ocean

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U.S. President Joe Biden speaks during a meeting with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen.

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on Sunday announced new steps to ban oil and gas drilling in the Arctic Ocean and limit onshore drilling in Alaska, to protect whales, seals, polar bears, grizzly bears and caribou.

The announcement comes as Biden is expected to approve [ConocoPhillips' massive Willow oil project](#), fiercely opposed by environmentalists, in Alaska's Arctic.

Biden will make nearly 3 million acres of the Beaufort Sea in the Arctic Ocean "indefinitely off limits" for oil and gas leasing, building on an Obama-era ban and effectively closing off U.S. Arctic waters to oil exploration.

In addition to the drilling ban, the government will put forward new protections for more than 13 million acres of "ecologically sensitive" Special Areas within Alaska's petroleum reserve, the administration said in a statement on Sunday.

The area includes the Teshekpuk Lake, Utukok Uplands, Colville River, Kasegaluk Lagoon and Peard Bay Special Areas.

The plan comes as Biden tries to balance his goals of decarbonizing the U.S. economy with calls to increase domestic fuel supply to keep prices low.

The Willow project would be located inside the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, a 23 million-acre (93 million-hectare) area on the state's North Slope that is the largest tract of undisturbed public land in the United States.

An environmental group said the new protections announced on Sunday did not go far enough and the government should stop oil and gas developments to help fight climate change.

"It's insulting that Biden thinks this will change our minds about the Willow project," said Kristen Monsell, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity.

"Protecting one area of the Arctic so you can destroy another doesn't make sense, and it won't help the people and wildlife who will be upended by the Willow project," she said.

On Friday, the White House pushed back on reports that Biden will authorize the project as soon as this week, saying a decision had not been made yet.

Reporting by Akriti Sharma in Bengaluru and Maria Caspani in New York; Additional reporting by Nichola Groom.

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