

California Offshore Fracking Needs More Study: Groups

Carolyn Whetzel, Bloomberg News, 8-19-16

Aug. 18 — A third environmental group plans to sue federal agencies for allowing hydraulic fracturing to continue along California's coast without adequately evaluating the potential threat to blue whales and other protected species.

The Center for Biological Diversity filed a 60-day notice of intent to sue Aug. 17, accusing two Interior Department agencies of violating the Endangered Species Act. The claims in the notice are similar to those in a suit filed Aug. 10 by the Environmental Defense Center and Santa Barbara Channelkeeper.

The planned lawsuit seeks to prevent approval of offshore well-stimulation treatments until a thorough analysis of their impacts on imperiled species can be completed, the group said.

At issue is a programmatic environmental assessment on the use of offshore well-stimulation treatments, like fracking and acidizing, in federal waters off the California coast and related “finding of no significant impact” that the Bureau of Ocean Management and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement issued May 27.

Consultations Sought

The two agencies made the decision without consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife or the NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service on the risks of the activities, as required by the Endangered Species Act, the Aug. 17 notice said.

“Every offshore frack puts California's wonderful coastal wildlife at risk from toxic chemicals or another deadly oil spill,” Kristen Monsell, the center's attorney, said in a statement. “It's disturbing to see the federal government ignore its legal responsibility to carefully consider the dangers of offshore fracking and prolonged drilling to whales, sea otters and other species struggling to survive.”

Most of the oil and gas platforms on the Pacific Outer Continental Shelf are in the Santa Barbara Channel, where endangered blue whales and humpback whales congregate at various times of the year, the notice said. The channel also is home to other listed species, including sea turtles, southern sea otters and black abalone, the notice said.

To contact the reporter on this story: Carolyn Whetzel in Los Angeles at cwhetzel@bna.com

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Larry Pearl at lpearl@bna.com

For More Information

The notice of intent to sue by the Center for Biological Diversity is available at <http://src.bna.com/hQ4>.

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