

# How did California dodge Obama's offshore oil plan?

Robert Salladay, California Watch, 4-1-10

In a word: politics.

The Obama administration's plan for new offshore drilling conspicuously avoids the North Atlantic and West Coast. That means "Obama will only ruin the coast of red states," as Wonkette slyly noted.

"States that voted for John McCain get to enjoy oil spills and coastal devastation. Not that they're the kind of people who own swimwear or go to beaches or swim or whatever. But what about Virginia? It went red for Bob McDonnell last November, and McDonnell loves him some oil drillin'! Enjoy that, Virginia!"

But political will – and environmental opposition – did play an important part in the Obama administration's decision to avoid blue states. As Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said on a conference call with reporters, according to Oil & Gas Journal, the "strategy does not include oil and gas activity off North Atlantic or West Coast states because opposition there was too great."

The administration also listed "lack of local support" on its new map of where it plans to drill on the Outer Continental Shelf.

"California is a place where you have the entire Pacific Coast, including governors and senators, opposed to any kind of offshore drilling," Salazar told KCRA 3. "Given the area's national wildlife refuges and marine sanctuaries, to actually develop the Pacific Ocean is not something that's going to happen."

Obama's strategy calls for developing oil and gas resources in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico, and more than 125 miles from Florida's coast. He proposes increasing oil and gas exploration in frontier areas, such as the Arctic Ocean and the Mid and South Atlantic Ocean, and protect ocean areas that are "simply too special to drill, such as Alaska's Bristol Bay."

In one red state, Virginia, Gov. McDonnell said the Obama administration's announcement "is good for Virginia workers, Virginia's economy, and national security."

In blue California, U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer praised Obama for leaving the Golden State out of the offshore-drilling equation. She said his plan protects the "state's \$23 billion coastal economy, thousands of jobs and the beauty of our state." Rep. Lois Capps, D-Santa Barbara, called the decision "a victory for California and for all of us on the south and central coasts who have been fighting to keep our coastline safe from new oil drilling."

Three dozen oil leases are currently pumping oil in federal waters off California. A moratorium on new drilling has been in place since 1991, and Obama's new plan essentially continues that ban.

But the Obama proposal won't stop the Arnold Schwarzenegger administration from pushing for new drilling off the Santa Barbara coast. The state controls leases up to three miles off the coast, and the governor hopes the Tranquillon Ridge project will bring in \$100 million a year in revenue over the next 10 years.

The state Assembly let the proposal die last year, but Schwarzenegger's spokesman told the LA Times yesterday that Obama's decision to tighten offshore drilling rules would have "no impact on T-Ridge."

Even that "one-off" project, as the governor's finance spokesman once described it, has gone through an arduous journey and, unless the Assembly changes its mind, remains essentially dead.

Many environmental groups had supported Tranquillion Ridge before it was voted down by the State Lands Commission in January 2009. But the project came with some important mitigation from Plains Exploration & Production Co., the Texas-based driller, including "a mandatory shutdown date of 2022, thousands of acres of permanently protected onshore lands, approximately \$350 million of tax revenue for Santa Barbara, and money for the state," the Santa Barbara Independent reported.

It's unclear if Schwarzenegger would be able to see the new Tranquillion Ridge project from his new 25-acre retirement property in Santa Barbara County.