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## SUN HERALD | Editorial: Drilling in the Sound's time has passed

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It appears the Mississippi Development Authority has come to its senses on the subject of drilling in the Mississippi Sound and near the barrier islands.

The Gulf Restoration Network, which has led the opposition to a plan to lease parts of our state waters to those who would like to explore for oil and natural gas, notes the deadline has passed for the MDA to appeal a Chancery Court ruling in the case.

That ruling told the MDA to properly assess the economic consequences of allowing drilling in the Sound.

"Gulf Restoration Network and Sierra Club commend the state for not throwing good money after bad with an appeal to the Mississippi Supreme Court," its officials wrote in a news release, "and sincerely hope that MDA will take the time and resources necessary to assess the impacts offshore drilling would have on the tourism economy, the environment and the quality of life in coastal communities."

We have said many times we wish the MDA would drop the idea altogether, but this is the next best thing.

Like the other opponents, we're sure any bona fide study will show drilling in the Sound is just too risky for the jewels of our tourism industry. The stakes are too high to roll the dice with those jewels on the line.

Other casino-centric markets are struggling, but ours is healthier.

And one reason for this is we have extra attractions those markets can't match.

We have offshore fishing, beaches and bayous and beautiful barrier islands with white sand and blue water.

The MDA would allow rigs just one mile from those islands.

"This drilling proposal has been flawed since day one," said Louie Miller, Director of Mississippi Sierra Club in a release from the Restoration Network. "Would we drill Cades Cove in the Great Smoky Mountains? Would we drill Vicksburg National Military Park? Of course not. So why would we drill around Gulf Islands National Seashore?"

"There are appropriate places to drill and inappropriate -- drilling in and around national parks is foolish at best."

We appreciate the work MDA does but wish it would stick to landing developments that enhance and complement the attractions we have, not threaten or detract from them.

Give us an amusement park to attract families, a movie to shoot, or an industry to employ our people. But let's make it an industry that fits in one of our many industrial areas.

Who knows? At the rate technology is advancing there may come a time when energy can be removed from beneath the Sound without ruining the view or risking its beauty.

But that time is not today.

Gambling certainly has its place in South Mississippi, but that is in one of our many casinos, not in the recreational areas that help draw tourists to them.

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