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## CLIMATE

# Why A Former 'President' Was Protesting An Offshore Lease Sale In New Orleans This Week

BY CLAIRE MOSER - GUEST CONTRIBUTOR AUG 20, 2015 9:41AM

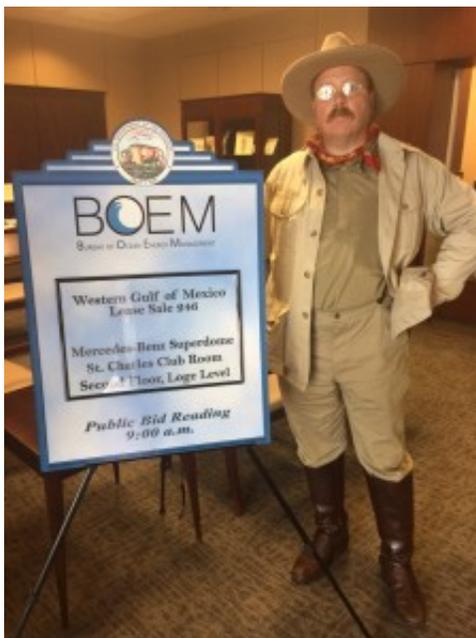
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*Protesters, including a Teddy Roosevelt impersonator, pose in New Orleans.*

Joined by a Teddy Roosevelt impersonator in New Orleans earlier this week, a group of conservationists called on the White House to postpone oil and gas lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico until Congress takes action to save what conservation groups call America's best parks program.

The Land and Water Conservation (LWCF) is a 50-year-old program intended to offset impacts of offshore drilling by investing in federal, state and local conservation projects funded entirely through fees from oil and gas companies. However, inaction from Congress has put "[America's Best Parks Program](#)" at risk of expiring next month.

"Royalties from offshore drilling are supposed to fund parks and trails, but for too long Congress has diverted these funds and now may even let the whole program expire," [said](#) Luke Metzger, the Gulf of Mexico Coordinator for Environment America. "Until the promise to our parks is restored, there should be no new sale of the Gulf of Mexico to oil and gas companies."



CREDIT: ENVIRONMENT AMERICA

Representatives from Environment America, Care2.com, the Gulf Restoration Network, and the Louisiana Bucket Brigade were joined on Monday by the “Conservation President” Teddy Roosevelt, to deliver a petition signed by more than 65,000 Americans calling on the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to “encourage Congress to take their responsibility for our nation’s natural heritage seriously.”

In addition to helping support many of the country’s most iconic national parks like the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone, LWCF has helped conserve millions of acres of land and create state and local outdoor projects in every state.

“By rescheduling the August lease sale, Secretary Jewell and the administration can save a program that is indispensable to the future of American parks and carry forward one of this country’s most celebrated conservation legacies,” a Center for American Progress column cited in the petition concluded.

Despite the program’s popularity and calls from both Republicans and Democrats to fully fund and permanently reauthorize LWCF, it is unlikely Congress will act before the program expires on September 30. Led by House Natural Resources Chair Rob Bishop (R-UT), a few members of Congress are advocating to alter the program, including redirecting and placing restrictions on LWCF funds.

Recognizing that time to reauthorize LWCF is running out, 21 Democratic senators led by Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) sent a letter to Senate energy leadership last month linking LWCF to another program in need of long term funding, the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT). PILT, which provides federal assistance to rural communities with public lands within their borders, is popular with many of the western members of Congress delaying action on LWCF. “Given the importance of these programs, we would oppose efforts to extend funding and reauthorization of PILT without taking similar action to reauthorize and fully fund LWCF,” the letter reads.

As Fuel Fix reported last week, although a provision reauthorizing LWCF was included in the broad Senate Energy bill released last month, "it is unclear whether that energy legislation will be fully debated, much less pass the Senate before the LWCF expires," and that the chances of the House picking up the legislation are "slim."

The national trade association representing the offshore industry, NOIA, responded to the calls to delay to the lease sale, calling the organizations "extremists" and "out of touch with energy reality" in a statement. "This is just another misguided and desperate attempt to shut down oil and natural gas production at all costs, and ignores projections showing that U.S. consumers will rely largely upon traditional fuels well into the future," said NOIA President Randall Luthi.

Despite calls for delays, Wednesday's lease sale of more than 21 million acres off the coast of Texas continued as planned.

"All the bids are in, and the winner is the oil industry while our parks have drawn the short end of the stick," said Environment America's Metzger in an email.

The auction attracted the lowest interest from oil companies since 1986, with five companies bidding \$22.7 million in sales.

The Department of the Interior has stepped up efforts in recent weeks to highlight the importance of LWCF and encourage Congress to act.

Last week, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell announced new LWCF funding to all 50 states, urging Congress to permanently reauthorize and fully fund the program. "A half century ago, Congress established a landmark law to use some revenues from offshore oil and gas development to help states and communities across America set aside green spaces, build boat docks and ball fields, and undertake other recreation projects," said Secretary Jewell. "Today, Congress has the opportunity to continue this great legacy by permanently reauthorizing and fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund."

Congress will have less than 25 days to act when it returns from recess in September.

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