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## Drilling, One Lake Need Real Public Airing-Out

By [JFP Editorial Board](#)

Wednesday, January 29, 2014 1:27 p.m. CST

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We oppose the state's plan to lease parcels in Mississippi's magnificently pristine sound to exploration and oil and gas drilling.

Like other critics of the plan, which includes environmental groups such as the Mississippi Sierra Club and Gulf Restoration Network as well as business owners whose livelihoods depend on tourism dollars, we are concerned about the potential for environmental and economic damage drilling might cause.

Less than four years since the 2010 BP oil spill, we are nowhere close to knowing the extent of the ecological damage the spill caused. And, as Mississippi slouches out of the Great Recession at a much slower pace than the rest of the nation, we believe that tourism revenue is too vital for Mississippi to play environmental Russian roulette.

Aside from those concerns, we are also uneasy about how Mississippi got here in the first place. First came Gov. Haley Barbour's last minute Christmas-time announcement that the Mississippi Development Authority would draft the rules for how a lease sale would move forward. Then, most disturbing, the so-called public hearing that MDA threw together was little more than a stenographer seated at a table scribbling down remarks from anyone who had time to drop by the Woolfolk Building in the middle of the day.

The slipshod process MDA used to fast-track the drilling plan is the main point of contention for plaintiffs in a lawsuit for which a hearing was recently held in Hinds County Chancery Court (see "Gulf Drilling Saga Almost Over?," page 18). Plaintiff groups argued before Judge William Singletary that MDA not only failed to conduct an economic-impact statement on the effects of drilling, but that the agency also never held a real public hearing.

We've written before about the Delphi Technique, a tool used to manufacture consensus, or at least the appearance of it, by quashing dissent. It is the brainchild of Rand Corp., which developed the strategy in the 1950s to make it look like the organizers of a "public hearing" are eager to listen to participants when the goal is really to quiet opponents as much as possible.

Many ostensibly open meetings our reporters cover reek of Delphi Technique. In late August, supporters of the One Lake real-estate-development and flood-control project used the same format for a public meeting. Facilitators said setting up information stations for their engineers to address individual concerns is an inherently better format to facilitate discussion than a traditional town-hall set-up.

In our view, when environmental resources and tax dollars are at stake, there is certainly room for both one-on-one chats and public forums. We look forward to the first real town hall meeting on the proposed One Lake project. We also hope that Judge Singletary orders MDA to restart its process by conducting a thorough economic analysis and holding a real public hearing.

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phone: 601-362-6121 (ext 11 sales, ext 16 editorial, ext 17 publisher)

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P.O. Box 5067 \* Jackson, MS \* 39296

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