

Published on *American Geosciences Institute* (<https://www.americangeosciences.org>)

Home > President Obama prohibits offshore drilling in Bristol Bay

---

## President Obama prohibits offshore drilling in Bristol Bay

December 16, 2014

On December 16, President Obama enacted an indefinite moratorium on offshore oil and gas development in Bristol Bay, Alaska. The area in the eastern Bering Sea has historically been placed off-limits to drilling by Democratic presidents and opened to energy leases by Republican administrations; this action will halt drilling through Obama's last term, but future presidents could once again open the area.

An estimated total of \$7.7 billion of oil and gas reserves underlie Bristol Bay, while its fisheries bring in an average of \$2.5 billion every year and supply 40 percent of U.S. wild-caught seafood. Because of the risk posed by oil spills and other chemical leaks, President Obama's action received a favorable reaction from the fishing industry, as well as Native Alaskan and conservation groups. Oil and gas companies have not expressed significant recent interest in Bristol Bay, but industry groups objected to the blanket ban on drilling.

The Bristol Bay watershed is also the proposed site of Pebble Mine, a large project that would produce copper, gold, and molybdenum. Environmental and fishing interests have expressed concerns over the mine's effect on Southwest Alaska and Bristol Bay's ecosystems, while proponents cite the jobs and economic growth that the mine could provide.

Sources: E&E News, [youtube.com/WhiteHouse](https://www.youtube.com/WhiteHouse)

---