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## South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

### Florida, and U.S., should heed NOAA's concerns over environmental impacts from oil drilling

**THE ISSUE: NOAA raises concerns over oil drilling.**

Sun Sentinel Editorial Board

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As Florida gets serious about tapping into oil reserves off the Gulf Coast as a way to pump up a sagging state budget, warnings about very real threats to the environment should serve as a wake-up call to pause the push for drilling off our shores.

And these warnings are not coming from just anyone, or from the usual suspects. They are coming from the federal government's top ocean scientists at the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration.

In strong language, NOAA said it was "very concerned" that the Department of Interior's 2010-2015 draft leasing plan to open up new drilling areas in the Arctic coast, the Atlantic seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico would have devastating impacts on marine life, commercial and recreational fisheries and the ocean's resources.

The agency's letter to Interior officials sharply criticizes the leasing plan's assessment of the risks of such catastrophes as oil spills, calling them "understated and generally not supported or referenced," according to the *Chicago Tribune*.

Before irreversible damage is done to sensitive environmental areas, NOAA is urging Interior to ban drilling in the Arctic until oil companies dramatically step up their ability to prevent and clean up oil spills, and to put off any new drilling until the Obama administration's ocean policy task force can complete its study of the issue.

Given the grave consequences of not heeding these warnings, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar should not hesitate to follow NOAA's advice, and Obama must prod him to do so.

The alarm sounded by an experienced, scientific voice like NOAA also underscores the need for Florida's Legislature to cool its impulse to plunder the seas in search of a way to pay the bills. The state's economy, and its budget, is in a bad way, and the search for new revenue streams, and new job markets, is a healthy one.

But the lasting dangers of oil drilling, validated by a measured agency of NOAA's stature, are too



The image contains a logo for 'yellow green farmers market' with the tagline 'fresh & hearty'. To the right is a map of Hollywood, FL, showing streets like Sheridan St, N Park Rd, N 30th Rd, Taft St, and N 28th Ave, along with Interstate 95. Below the map and logo is a promotional banner for the market's opening events: 'GREEN OPENING Sunday, November 8th' and 'GRAND OPENING Sunday, November 15th'. At the bottom of the banner is the website 'www.ygfarmersmarket.com' and contact information: '1940 North 30th Road . Hollywood . Florida 33021', 'T. 954.513.3990 . F. 954.966.2449 . E. info@ygfarmersmarket.com'.

menacing to ignore, especially for a state that prizes, and banks on, its pristine beaches and reefs. At the very least, the concerns deserve thorough study before imperiling Florida's environmental future with an impulsive quest for cash.

*BOTTOM LINE:* A siren call for Florida to take heed.

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