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### **Lawsuit Filed to Stop Department of Interior From Continuing to Issue New Offshore Drilling Permits With No Environmental Review**

WASHINGTON— The Center for Biological Diversity today filed suit against Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar over his continued approval of offshore drilling plans in the Gulf of Mexico without environmental review. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Washington, D.C., seeks to overturn Department of Interior policies exempting oil drilling from the environmental reviews required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

BP's Deepwater Horizon drilling plan was approved in 2009 under the "categorical exclusion" exemption policy, leading to the April 20, 2010 explosion that killed 11 people and caused what is likely the largest oil spill in U.S. history. Despite the catastrophe, Secretary Salazar allowed the Minerals Management Service to issue 26 new drilling approvals — all exempt from environmental review — after the explosion.

"Ken Salazar has learned absolutely nothing from this national catastrophe," said Kierán Suckling, executive director of the Center for Biological Diversity. "He is still illegally exempting dangerous offshore drilling projects in the Gulf of Mexico from all environmental review as millions of gallons of oil gush into the ocean. It is outrageous and unacceptable.

"Today's lawsuit seeks to turn Salazar's fictitious 'moratorium' on oil-drilling approvals into a real one," added Suckling.

Secretary Salazar has been embroiled in controversy since it was revealed on May 5, 2010 that he allowed the Minerals Management Service to exempt BP's offshore drilling plan from environmental review by using a loophole in the National Environmental Policy Act meant only to apply to projects with no, or minimal, negative effects — such as construction of outhouses and hiking trails. The controversy deepened when it was revealed that the agency routinely exempts hundreds of dangerous offshore oil drilling projects in the Gulf of Mexico every year.

"It is inconceivable that Ken Salazar could go visit what is likely the worst oil spill in American history, then continue to allow the rubber-stamping of new drilling permits based on the absurd claim that an oil spill cannot occur and would not be dangerous if it did. It is positively Kafkaesque," said Suckling.

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