



Info Alert

**National Conference of State Legislatures  
Office of State-Federal Relations**

**President Obama Withdraws Arctic and Atlantic Waters from Future Development**

December 21, 2016

On Dec. 20, President Obama issued an [executive order](#) based on Section 12(a) of the [Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act](#) (OCSLA) that would “withdraw from disposition by leasing for a time period without specific expiration” most Arctic waters and portions of the Atlantic Ocean. Specifically, the area withdrawn comprises more than 125 million acres and includes the entire Chukchi Sea and a "significant portion" of the Beaufort Sea, as well as 31 underwater canyons in the Atlantic. The withdrawal does not affect current leases and also excludes 2.8 million acres in the Beaufort Sea (see map below)

Additionally, current administration officials cited that section 12(a) only allows the president to withdraw waters and the lack of existing law to undo a designation by a future president would prevent this executive order from being overturned, although some industry officials offered a different legal interpretation.

In a similar move, Canada also [announced](#) that it will freeze oil and gas leasing in its Arctic waters for at least the next five years.

For any further questions or concerns, please contact NCSL staff [Ben Husch](#) (202-624-7779) or [Kristen Hildreth](#) (202-624-3597).

