

ENERGY & THE ENVIRONMENT IN HORRY COUNTY

Horry County is on the front lines of a battle for sound energy and environmental management in South Carolina. Decisions about electric costs and local options over environmental concerns are hot topics in the South Carolina legislature. Locally, Horry County Democrats are taking strong stands against offshore drilling and plastic pollution.



Sound Energy Management Practices Needed

Horry County, like the rest of South Carolina, is at a crossroads when it comes to energy management. The failure to build two nuclear plants over the last 10 years changed the landscape of the state's plan to provide power for future generations. South Carolina now has a chance to adopt sound energy management practices to move the state into the mid-21st century.

South Carolina: Highest Monthly Electric Costs in the Nation

On average, South Carolina households consume 1380 kWh/month. In 2017, the average price/kWh in the state was \$0.1257, for a monthly bill of \$173.47. That is the highest monthly electric cost in all 50 states. Why? The answer is a morass complicated by:

- [The Base Load Review Act](#)
- [The failed V.C. Summer nuclear reactor project](#)
- [The Public Service Commission \(PSC\)](#)

In 2007, the South Carolina legislature passed the Base Load Review Act. At the same time, Santee Cooper, the state-owned electric company, and SCE&G (South Carolina Energy and Gas) were partnering to build two nuclear reactors at the V.C. Summer site near Columbia. The Act empowered the Public Service Commission to allow SCE&G to charge its customers in advance for the cost plus profit to build the plants.

SCE&G proceeded to bill its customers a surcharge that effectively raised their electric rate to \$0.15/kWh to cover its share of the proposed \$11 million plants. Ten years and \$22 million later, the V.C. Summer reactors have not been built. The legislature is grappling with who will cover the costs.



Killing Solar

In 2018, the South Carolina House took a giant step backward from sound energy management when it killed a pro-job and pro-consumer solar energy bill. Originally supported by a bipartisan coalition, the bill was defeated at the last minute when lobbyists for Duke Energy maneuvered to change votes.

At the same time, lawyers from SCE&G testified before the PSC that we don't need additional sources of energy because demand is (currently) flat. They argued that there's not enough sunshine in South Carolina in August to justify paying a fair price for solar generated electricity.

As a result, the PSC granted the utilities' request for a minimal price for solar generated power. The low price made rooftop solar and solar farms unprofitable for owners. Lack of returns will harm solar initiatives and threaten the jobs of 3000 workers currently in what should be a fast-growth industry.

For many years, the power companies have held the State's electric consumers hostage.

The power companies contribute to the campaign coffers of elected officials and to those elected to the PSC itself. As a result, regulators have been soft on the power companies.

It is now time for a comprehensive energy management program that will take South Carolina into the future, without reliance on coal-fired electricity generation.

Why not drill here?

- The obvious potential for massive environmental damage should a well leak.
- The tourism problem with unsightly onshore facilities.
- The oil is not needed domestically, but would be shipped offshore.
- Drilling's contribution to the local economy is dwarfed by the tourist income generated over that same period.
- Revenues from oil sales accrue to the federal government, not the state of South Carolina, so there is no reason to risk the South Carolina coastal economy for oil revenues.



DeepWater Horizon Oil Spill

The Battle for Sovereign Energy and Environmental Management

Since the outcome of the 2016 elections, energy and environmental management decisions have been foisted on coastal South Carolina counties by state and federal government departments. There is little respect by government officials for the concerns of local citizens for the protection of their unique environment.

The Prospect of Offshore Drilling

Stop Offshore Drilling Now

The continental shelf of the Atlantic Ocean has long been seen by oil companies as a prospective target for offshore oil drilling. However, The Obama administration did not issue permits for oil exploration and drilling.

It's different today.

The Trump administration indicated that permits would be made available for all US coastal regions. They then exempted the east coast of Florida because of its "unique" qualities. (Wouldn't want those nasty oil rigs within sight of Trump's Mar-a-Lago.)

In the meantime, governors of the remaining coastal states, including South Carolina, have requested identical consideration for their states. The Grand Strand is 60 miles of white sand beach that includes the entire Horry County coastline. Tourism, fishing, and the low country way of life are threatened by the prospect of offshore drilling.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is responsible for issuing permits to explore and drill for oil. The Bureau has collected public comments from local citizens. In Horry County, the fishing and tourism industries, as well as thousands of concerned citizens, have submitted comments against offshore drilling.

Seismic Testing & its Impact

The first step in undersea O&G exploration is seismic testing of the sea floor to determine whether oil is likely to be found in an area.

Arrays of powerful air guns that are louder than howitzers are towed behind boats and fired every 10-15 seconds 24 hours/day for weeks to months at a time. The sound travels to the sea floor and bounces back to sensors on the boat that “read” the ocean floor and indicate whether oil deposits are likely in the area.

- **50% Decline in Commercial Fish Catch**
- **Shellfish Stop Breeding**
- **138,000 Marine Mammals Will Die**

The sound is intense in the immediate area, and can travel thousands of square miles. Marine mammals that rely on echolocation are extremely stressed by being in or near this “war zone.” Fish exit the area. Shellfish and crustaceans stop breeding. The entire marine ecosystem is negatively affected by the constant bombardment.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), which leases ocean tracts to developers, estimates that *138,000 marine mammals will be killed or injured* by each

of the five companies that have applied to perform seismic testing of the Atlantic continental shelf. Testing will continue for years.

History has shown that *commercial fish catch rates decline up to 50 percent* in the areas where the sound travels, with much higher reductions in the immediate area. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council foresees a major negative impact on commercial and recreational fishing if seismic testing is permitted off South Carolina’s coast.

But despite this, Republican Congressman Tom Rice is in favor of seismic testing (though not offshore drilling), “because we should know what’s out there.”

Seismic testing characterizes the undersea rock strata that might house oil deposits. To know with surety, the prospective site must be drilled. So, even after damage to the marine animals is done, there’s no guarantee of payback.

During the drilling and pumping phase, oil spills are always a risk. While human error has caused the most severe spills, weather has caused 55 percent of all offshore oil spills. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita destroyed 114 oil rigs in the Gulf in 2005.

The Deepwater Horizon spill covered an area of the Gulf equivalent to the states of North and South Carolina. With our location in the hurricane belt, South Carolina coastal rigs will be at major risk for an oil spill...a disaster that could kill tourism for years, at a cost of billions in revenue, property value, and fisheries. Unlike the Gulf which is contained, a spill on the Atlantic coast would be spread by the Gulf Stream and by local currents to damage thousands of miles of beaches.

What is the payback to the local economy?

The oil industry estimates that by 2035, offshore drilling will bring \$2.7 billion and 24,000 jobs to the South Carolina economy.

Tourism currently contributes **\$7 billion a year**, and employs **78,000 people**.

By 2035, tourism will have contributed **\$119 billion** (2017 dollars).

There is simply no incentive for coastal South Carolina to risk her economy for the de minimus contribution of offshore oil.

Twenty-three coastal communities have passed resolutions opposing offshore drilling, but some upstate South Carolina legislators favor offshore drilling. The federal government, encouraged by oil industry lobbyists, is pushing for development of offshore oil fields. The rising cost of a barrel of oil makes the development of offshore resources more profitable.

Local Environmental Management Threatened

Citizens of coastal South Carolina are becoming alarmed at plastic pollution of our land, streams, beaches, and oceans.

In an effort to lessen the plastics getting into our environment, the local communities of Surfside Beach in Horry County, and Isle of Palms and Foley Beach in Charleston County, have voted to implement user fees or ban single use plastic containers.

Other communities along the Grand Strand are considering similar action, but the Republican held South Carolina Legislature is threatening local environmental management by attempting to block communities from regulating plastics under local ordinance.

Taking Action on Plastic Litter

Through adoption of a Zero Waste initiative, Horry County Democrats (HCDP) are taking action to eliminate the use of all single use plastics at party events. The HCDP is working to educate voters about the dangers of plastics to our environment and the animals that share it.



Save Our Seas: Help End the Plastics Plague

It is time that South Carolina adopt responsible energy and environmental management practices. The current Republican administrations in Columbia and in Washington are not operating in the best interest of the citizens of South Carolina.

It is time for a change.

The Democratic Party will support the changes needed to take South Carolina successfully into the mid-century.

Join in the effort to help solve these problems.

Please contact us at issues@horrydemocrats.org.

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