

# The Palm Beach Post

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## Statewide 'Hands Across the Sand' protest objects to proposals to drill off Florida

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People wearing black will join hands at beaches around Florida on Saturday to protest the possibility of oil drilling in Florida waters.

The Hands Across the Sand movement is intended to show Florida legislators that large numbers of voters disapprove of a proposal to allow oil drilling between 3 and 10 miles off Florida's coast, said Dave Rauschkolb, a surfer and owner of Bud & Alley's restaurant in Seaside. He saw the anti-drilling movement snowball after he launched the Handsacrossthesand.org Web site last year.

Rauschkolb said he expects protests Saturday at 80 beaches from Jacksonville to Key West to Pensacola.

"This is an issue that Floridians of all political affiliations and walks of life are joining hands about," Rauschkolb said. "I know many tourists who come to our beaches to get away from oil rigs."

The proposal to open Florida waters to oil drilling, pushed by Florida Energy Associates, passed in the state House in April but was stopped by Gov. Charlie Crist and Senate leaders.

Oil drilling in Florida waters is expected to come up again during the spring legislative session, said Eric Draper, executive director of the Audubon of Florida.

Draper said the Hands Across the Sand movement could send a clear message to legislators in Tallahassee.

"In concept, we have all of Florida forming a human barrier against the threat of oil drilling," Draper said. "They're saying put our beaches and our economy first."

The Lake Worth City Commission passed a resolution against oil drilling in Florida waters in December and invited the Palm Beach County chapter of the Surfrider Foundation to organize a Hands protest at Lake Worth Beach.

"All we're being asked to do Saturday is stand on the beach, wearing black, to express our mourning and indignation that such an idea would even come this far on the political scope," said Donna Ross, who plans to join the protest at Lake Worth Beach.

"Hopefully not everyone will drive there individually," Ross said. "Let's walk, bike, hitchhike, carpool or even swim to do our tiny part to guard against a potentially giant mistake."

Jody Young of the Palm Beach County Democratic Party said he has invited county commissioners and state legislators to join the protest against oil drilling at Lantana Beach.

"It's not something we want to see in our lifetime or our children's lifetimes," Young said. "Instead of 'drill baby drill,' we're telling them 'think baby think.'"

Regardless of the turnout Saturday, the process of organizing the statewide protest has created a network of people determined to protect the state's 663 miles of beaches, Rauschkolb said.

"There's chambers of commerce and conservation groups working together," he said. "People come to Florida to go to the beach. It's the most valuable asset we have besides sunshine."

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