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Protesters across Florida rally against offshore oil drilling

By Maria Herrera, Sun Sentinel

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Fort Lauderdale

They looked like dark spots of tar freshly washed upon the shore.

The black sweaters and jackets they wore on the chilly Saturday afternoon symbolized what could happen to South Florida beaches in the event of an oil spill caused by offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

"The Gulf Stream would bring it here in 24 hours," said Ed Stroble, a self-proclaimed "green Republican" who attended the event. "There are alternatives to this."

More than 60 people showed up at Fort Lauderdale's beach to hold hands in opposition to drilling for oil off the Florida coastline. Called Hands Across the Sand, the protest is aimed at raising awareness about legislation brewing in Washington and Tallahassee that could open the Florida waters to drilling. Oil companies could drill as close as three to 10 miles from the beach.

"There's been a huge push to open Florida waters for offshore drilling," said event organizer Matthew Schwartz with the Sierra Club. "We look at the issue of offshore drilling as a looming storm."

More than 70 similar gatherings took place on beaches throughout Florida. In [Delray Beach](#), about 30 people showed up, including the Raging Grannies. They came armed with songs written especially for the event.

The Surfrider Foundation and the city of Lake Worth also organized a Hands Across the Sand event at the Lake Worth Pier. People gathered there around noon for a beach cleanup before the rally.

"People think it's a step backwards," Schwartz said of possible legislation allowing offshore drilling. "My own concern is the wildlife and the wildlife habitat in case of a spill."

Schwartz said drilling poses a unique threat to Florida's coastal mangroves. He fears it would be impossible to clean up if there was ever a spill.

"The risks are way too great, and the benefits way to small," he said.



Others worried about the effect a spill would have on tourism.

"The tourism dollars support our schools, our highways and our local governments," said George Cavros, who is with the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy. "Tourism is the lifeblood of South Florida. We should risk that because of promises by Texan oil men."

Nick and Marie Cord of Pennsylvania watched as the crowd flashed signs that said "Save the Tourists." Some wore alligators, dolphin and mermaid outfits.

"I agree with these protesters," said Marie Cord. "With hurricanes, there's no doubt they're going to have spills."

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