**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Broad Coalition of Coastal Groups and Elected Officials Speak Out at Rally Opposing Offshore Oil Drilling in Maryland**

**ANNAPOLIS, MD., January 16, 2018 -** Environmental leaders, business leaders, fishermen, and state officials spoke out against offshore oil drilling today at a rally in Annapolis. The rally was in response to a Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) public hearing held at the Annapolis DoubleTree by Hilton. At the hearing, the public was invited to comment on the Trump Administration’s proposal to offer lease sales for oil drilling three miles offshore of Maryland.

"Our tourism industry is the heart of our local economy,” said Melanie Pursel, Executive Director, Ocean City Chamber of Commerce. “It wouldn’t take a big spill to scare people away. Even a small spill that might shut down Ocean City’s beach during a busy summer weekend could have a major impact. It’s just not worth the risk.”

The Draft Proposed Five-Year OCS Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing Plan released by BOEM threatens ocean recreation, tourism, and fishing industries, which provide more than $7.1 billion in GDP and 92,000 jobs annually in Maryland. Nationally, ocean tourism provides 12 times the amount of jobs to the U.S. economy as offshore oil production. This proposal puts Maryland’s coastal communities, economies, beaches, surf breaks, and marine ecosystems at risk.

“Our coastal resources and communities are far too valuable to risk a failure in offshore drilling or its infrastructure,” said Tony Friedrich, a recreational fisherman. “The Mid-Atlantic population puts enough pressure on the marine environment. We need to conserve what we have, not present more threats."

As demonstrated by the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010, oil spills have the potential to damage entire ecosystems and economies. Since 1969, there have been at least 44 large oil spills (over 10,000 barrels of oil each) in our nation’s marine waterways. Offshore oil drilling in Maryland would be preceded by seismic airgun blasting, a way of mapping where oil deposits are located. The noise from this activity can injure or kill fish eggs, larvae, and marine life, and impair the hearing of marine mammals such as whales and dolphins. In addition, seismic blasting has been implicated in whale beaching and stranding incidents.

"Beyond the environmental risks and the wrong direction this plan takes in regard to addressing climate change, what is most concerning here is the utter disrespect this plan shows to communities across the country who have voiced loud and clear they do not want drilling off their coast,” said Matt Heim of Assateague Coastal Trust. “If citizen and state voices really matter, like Secretary Zinke and the Trump Administration profess, they will listen to governors like Larry Hogan and communities up and down the East Coast and remove the entire Atlantic from consideration."

Annapolis City Council member Rob Savidge welcomed the event participants to the capital city and explained that while no actual drilling is planned for the Chesapeake Bay, there is still a great risk for Annapolis.

"If there is an oil spill, it's a disaster that will impact the entire Chesapeake Bay,” said Savidge. “Our Bay is the center of our economy, our communities, and our well-being, both here in Annapolis and for much of Maryland. On top of that, Annapolis faces an existential threat from climate change, which is perpetuated by such fossil fuel extraction. We must say no to offshore drilling."

“Offshore drilling is inherently dangerous, and it will not solve our nation’s energy needs,” said Jane Robinson, Chair, Ocean City Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation. “According to the Department of Energy, fully developing all of our recoverable offshore oil reserves would lower gas prices by only 3 cents. Is such a tradeoff worth the risk to our coastal economies, including tourism, recreation, and commercial fishing, which generate billions of dollars in annual revenue? Maryland can’t afford an oil spill.”

“The Governor and the people of Maryland oppose offshore drilling,” stated Terra Pascarosa, Oceana Virginia Organizer. “Our coastal communities depend on a clean coast and healthy ocean for our livelihoods in tourism, fishing and recreation. Oceana will attend the BOEM hearings so that our voices can be heard loud and clear in Maryland.”

"Our coast is too precious to be put in the crosshairs of this plan,” said Kathy Phillips, Assateague Coastkeeper. “Every citizen deserves clean, swimmable, fishable waterways. Even a small spill would imperil our coastal ecosystems, economy, and way of life. Maryland's coastal communities and state leaders have already spoken and it's time for this administration to listen."

“The Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure, and drilling offshore poses unjustifiable risks to the Bay, its living resources, the tourism economy, and the many jobs that depend on clean water,” said William C. Baker, President, Chesapeake Bay Foundation. “Ocean waters play a critical role in supporting the Bay's natural resources. For example, all of the Bay’s blue crabs utilize these waters during their early life stages. An oil spill at the wrong time of year could destroy an entire year class. We are beginning to see progress in Bay restoration. Now is not the time to put that progress at risk.”

"Allowing drilling off our coast would threaten Maryland's coastline, marine ecosystems, and the health and economic well-being of our communities," said Sierra Club Maryland Chapter Director Josh Tulkin. "Marylanders are here today to send a clear message to the Trump administration: from Alaska to Ocean City, we do not support offshore drilling."

###

**About the Surfrider Foundation**

 The Surfrider Foundation is a non-profit grassroots organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of our world’s ocean, waves and beaches through a powerful network. Founded in 1984 by a handful of visionary surfers in Malibu, California, the Surfrider Foundation now maintains over 500,000 supporters, activists and members, with more than 80 volunteer-led chapters and 70 clubs in the U.S., and more than 450 victories protecting our coasts. Learn more at surfrider.org.

**Media contacts:**

John Weber, Surfrider Foundation, 732-567-1787, jweber@surfrider.org

Matt Heim, Assateague Coastal Trust, 410-629-1538, staff@actforbays.org

Terra Pascarosa, Oceana,757-291-4736, tpascarosa@oceana.org