President Donald Trump’s move to make good on campaign promises to boost the energy industry drew protests Thursday from environmentalists and public officials over his anticipated bid to allow new offshore oil drilling in the Atlantic, Arctic and Pacific oceans, including California’s North Coast.

The president’s executive order, expected Friday, will call for a review of the government’s five-year oil and natural gas drilling plan, potentially reversing protections set by former President Barack Obama and challenging California’s four decades of nearly unanimous opposition to oil drilling.

The abrupt turnabout on a cornerstone energy policy will set off a legal and political battle that could stall any new energy development for years, experts said.
But the prospect triggered concern from coast to coast and even in Sonoma County, where the ocean is protected by a marine sanctuary that prohibits oil exploration.

“This is the first time in 35 years that California has been a target for offshore drilling,” said Richard Charter of Bodega Bay, a veteran anti-drilling advocate.

A congressional moratorium established in 1982 prevented new oil wells on the California coast. After the moratorium was suspended in 2009, Obama removed California from the federal oil drilling plan that Trump now seeks to expand.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who would handle the review, told reporters Tuesday the federal government would “look at everything.”

On Wednesday, Trump signed an executive order directing Zinke to review the creation of 24 national monuments designated by previous presidents with an eye toward opening the protected lands to drilling, mining and logging.

Zinke will be the featured speaker Monday at a conference in Houston, Texas, on the importance of the harnessing the nation’s offshore energy resources.

The calamitous Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969 fixed California on a course against offshore oil, backed by all seven governors since then. It has
evolved into a campaign to protect the state’s $40 billion-a-year coastal economy.

Marine sanctuaries protect the coast from San Luis Obispo County to Point Arena, but there are four potential drilling targets farther north in Mendocino County, Charter said. A spill in that area would likely foul the Sonoma Coast, he said.

“The threat to the North Coast is imminent and real,” said Charter, a senior fellow with the Ocean Foundation. “This is like a nightmare coming into focus.”

Given freedom to pursue drilling on the California coast, the oil industry’s first target would be the Santa Barbara Channel and the second would be the Mendocino and Humboldt coasts, Charter predicted. The area from Point Arena to the Oregon border holds more than 2 billion barrels of undiscovered technically recoverable oil, according to the Interior Department’s Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

“We’ve been advocating for expanded access to domestic energy resources for years,” Erik Milito of the American Petroleum Institute, an oil and natural gas trade association, told The Hill, a political website.

A spokeswoman for the Western States Petroleum Association declined to comment on the administration’s plans.

“This is really a member issue more than an association one,” Kara
Siepmann said in an email.

Politicians from Washington to Sacramento weighed in Wednesday.

California Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris joined 25 other Senate Democrats in signing a letter to Zinke urging him not to remove the protection for the three oceans.

The oil leasing prohibition is “essential to protect key industries for our states, such as fishing and tourism, our environment and our climate,” the letter said.

The five-year drilling plan finalized by Obama in November made more than 45 billion barrels of oil available for drilling, the senators said. Extracting and burning all the available oil and natural gas “would already be disastrous for our climate,” the letter said.
The signers included both senators from Washington and Oregon, reaffirming the solid West Coast wall of opposition to offshore oil drilling.

Obama’s plan limited future oil development to the Gulf of Mexico, which produces about 20 percent of the nation’s crude oil, according to the U.S. Energy Information Agency.

“California’s door is closed to President Trump’s Pacific oil and gas drilling,” Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, chairman of the State Lands Commission, said in a press release.
The commission, which manages or oversees all submerged lands along the coast, is “unequivocally resolved to create an environmental rampart along California’s coast,” he said.

Commissioners have directed staffers to take steps to ensure “that any oil and gas product from new drilling never makes landfall in California,” Newsom said.

“It’s infuriating,” said state Sen. Mike McGuire, D-Healdsburg, whose district covers the North Coast. “The California coast is our sacred cow and we will fight President Trump every step of the way.”

Coastal industries contribute $40 billion a year to the state economy, including $7 billion from commercial fishing, he said.

West Sonoma County Supervisor Lynda Hopkins, who met with Charter on Wednesday, posted on her Facebook page: “This gets a big ‘No Way in Hell’ from your 5th District supervisor.”

State and local governments can control the onshore development that North Coast oil operations would require and their opposition could chill oil industry interest in the region, Charter said.

Revising the oil leasing plan would take at least 18 months, he said, and the inevitable legal challenges could delay its implementation considerably.

“As far as I can tell, the fight started some time ago,” Charter said.

You can reach Staff Writer Guy Kovner at 707-521-5457 or guy.kovner@pressdemocrat.com. On Twitter @guykovner.
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