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Oil drilling foes launch petition for 2012 ballot

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By [KEITH LAING](#)

TALLAHASSEE -- Opponents of near-shore oil drilling are gearing up to ask voters to do what the Legislature wouldn't this summer -- put a drilling ban on the 2012 ballot -- but backers of a mandate for power companies to produce more electricity from renewable energy are still waiting for lawmakers.

The Florida Wildlife Federation, Progress Florida and the Sea Turtle

Conservancy this week launched "Save our Seas, Beaches and Shores, Inc.," aimed at garnering the nearly 700,000 signatures it would take to put the drilling ban on the 2012 ballot.

"We want the public to have the chance to vote on near-shore oil drilling and to ban the possibility of this destructive practice," the organization said in a statement. "Our state relies on clean beaches for our economic and environmental well-being. Oil drilling in our state marine waters, which extend approximately three miles into the Atlantic Ocean and 10 miles into the Gulf of Mexico, is simply too great a risk to take."

Drilling opponents had hoped lawmakers would put the issue on the ballot earlier this year, but they declined to do so in a special session.

Backers will have until Feb. 1 of the election year to collect signatures.

Meanwhile, Florida Business Network for a Clean Energy Economy Director Susan Glickman said Tuesday that environmentalists are still considering launching a separate petition drive for a 2012 constitutional amendment vote on the renewable standard.

But Glickman said the groups supporting the renewable energy standard, which would require power companies to produce 20 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020, are wary of money it would take to collect signatures.

"There's certainly interest in that and it is being explored, but we're mindful of the challenge of petitions," Glickman said. "We have not (launched a signature drive) yet, in large part because it takes a lot of resources and it seems like something the Legislature should do, since 30 other states have passed renewable energy standards."

Prior to the brief -- and contentious -- special session this summer, when lawmakers

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convened for less than a day and adjourned without taking up the drilling ban that Gov. Charlie Crist called them back for, Glickman and other environmentalists had said publicly that they would also consider pushing for a 2012 vote on a renewable quota requirement.

Florida Renewable Energy Producers Association President Michael Dobson said in May that it was looking more and more like the only way to get a renewable industry going in the state.

While lawmakers were reluctant to approve the renewable energy standard themselves, they may be willing to put it on the ballot for the voters to decide.

Glickman said that could be an uphill climb, but she noted that lawmakers in the House passed a voluntary renewable bill last year that she said would have allowed power companies "to pick whatever technologies they want and get cost recovery."

Glickman said she and other environmentalists still think the mandate is the best way to spur investment in renewable energy and said she was confident voters would too.

The coalition that will ask residents to OK a ballot question on drilling said the move is necessary because lawmakers won't do it, noting that as recently as 2009, the House voted to end the present statutory moratorium on near-shore drilling. The Senate stopped that effort.

Critics of the drilling ban have argued that it is unnecessary because the moratorium is still in place, and there is little political appetite to change that now in the wake of Gulf of Mexico oil spill this summer. Even Senate President-designate Mike Haridopolos, a Republican who had been an ardent supporter of the push to allow drilling as close as three-miles to Gulf shores, hosted a clean energy summit this summer and said it was time to "turn the page" on drilling.

But supporters of the ban said putting it in the constitution now would prohibit the drilling proposal from popping back up when the politics are better.

The Save Our Seas, Save Our Beaches petition would "forestall any future attempt to allow near-shore oil drilling," backers said in their announcement this week.

Backers will have until Feb. 1 of the election year to collect signatures.

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