

Supervisors officially join suit to ban offshore drilling ✓

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SANTA CRUZ — The Board of Supervisors formally joined the legal effort to block offshore oil drilling off the California coast Tuesday.

In a motion raised by Third District Supervisor Gary Patton, the Board voted to sign a contract with seven other county and city agencies in the state to hire a law firm to represent them in the courts.

The vote was 3-1, with First District Supervisor Dan Forbus against. Although theoretically a supporter of the effort to block the drilling, Forbus said he was voting "no" because he disagreed with some of the other people involved in the litigation.

Supervisor E. Wayne Moore, of Watsonville, was absent from the meeting. He's serving a two-week stint as an Army reserve: and won't be back until next week.

Recently, a state court issued a temporary injunction against the sale of lease

73, which stretches from Morro Bay to Point Conception (below Lompoc).

The tracts are between three and 48 miles offshore.

Santa Cruz County agreed earlier this year to join the counties of San Luis Obispo, Monterey and San Mateo, and the cities of Santa Barbara, Morro Bay and Pismo Beach in this action. Also joining it is the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG).

Santa Cruz is the only entity so far that will not have a financial obligation to contribute to the fees paid to the San Francisco law firm of Beers and Dickson.

The county's action supports a lawsuit filed Nov. 8 by the Coastal Commission. That agency claims former Secretary of the Interior James Watt erred in approving the lease sale. Watt's action was taken prior to his resignation.

The Coastal Commission claims the sale shortchanged public input and minimized the participation of local governments.