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### **Western Groups Welcome Department of Interior's Major Reforms of the Federal Coal Program**

Today, the Department of Interior announced a complete review of the federal coal program. The review comes in response to calls from citizens from across the nation, including many from the coalfield communities of Wyoming and Montana. Thousands of Westerners participated in listening sessions or offered written comments last summer and fall in response to Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell's call for an "open and honest conversation" about federal coal management. The Department's announcement signals the Administration heard those voices.

The last major revision of the federal coal program came almost three decades ago, and our understanding of the environmental and social effects of coal leasing and mining has greatly improved since.

Bob LeResche is the Chair of the Powder River Basin Resource Council and sits on the Board of the Western Organization of Resource Councils. In response to the announcement today, he stated:

*"This is an historic action that is much needed and long overdue. It will ensure that the federal government receives a fair return for taxpayers and communities, and balances energy demand with the significant impacts coal creates to our air, land, water, and wildlife resources, and to the global climate, as well as generating important economic activity in our states. We applaud President Obama and Secretary Jewell for taking this action. Given what we know about coal's costs, and given huge recent changes in the structure of the industry, it's a critical time for the nation to pause the federal coal program and take fresh stock of the effects this program has on the environment and our communities. We support the Department's proposal to prepare a broad analysis and re-align federal coal management with public policy by addressing the impacts of climate change and ensure a fair return to taxpayers and communities."*

The Powder River Basin of Wyoming and Montana produces over 40% of the nation's coal. The vast majority of this coal is federally owned -- by U.S. taxpayers. The Department of Interior

manages leasing and mining of this coal resource and has a legal duty to ensure that leasing is in the “public interest.”

Steve Charter, a past chair of Montana-based Northern Plains Resource Council, and a landowner who ranches above an underground coal mine mining federal coal stated:

*“There have been more than 15 investigations from both inside and outside the government, and all of them have found massive costs to taxpayers from mismanagement of the federal coal program. Public lands and public resources should be managed for the public good—not for the bottom lines of private corporations. I’m glad to see the Administration taking a step toward ensuring that taxpayers receive a fair return on coal that we all own.”*

Today’s announcement included a strategic pause on new leasing until the review is complete. However, due to a slow-down in market conditions, companies have asked for delays on processing almost all of the pending leases. This provides time for the government to institute reforms before new leasing takes place. There are presently 20 years of coal reserves already leased, and Interior’s proposal allows for emergency leasing if supplies run short, so the moratorium should not restrict market availability during the analysis. Rather, the pause should avoid flooding the market with speculative leasing at discounted prices.

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