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PRESS STATEMENT

Westerners support reforming broken leasing system for federal coal, oil and gas

Billings, MT -- President Biden today signed several executive orders, including a pause on further leasing of oil and gas by the federal government, and a review of all existing leasing and permitting practices related to fossil fuel development on public lands.

Federal mineral leasing programs have been [repeatedly criticized by government watchdogs](#) for wasting public resources. Additionally, development of these publicly-owned fossil fuels remains one of the single largest sources of climate-disrupting carbon pollution in the country, necessitating reform and actions to address the climate crisis. Pausing new oil and gas leasing will not result in a shortage of leases available to continue production. In fact, the industry is already sitting on millions of unused acres of leases. Nearly half (47.1 percent) of the 22.1 million actively leased acres are currently sitting idle, [generating only \\$1.50 per acre](#) for taxpayers annually while preventing [other beneficial use](#) of the land.

In response, representatives of grassroots community organizations in Western states issued the following:

“We applaud the new administration for their immediate action to pause and review oil and gas leasing programs on federal lands and minerals. This is a necessary and long overdue action to stop the looting of public resources as fossil fuel developers accumulate excess leases at today’s bargain basement prices.

Thousands of acres of federal subsurface resources are already leased and undeveloped, so this pause in breakneck leasing will neither harm producers with economic resources nor slow our energy economy.

What it will do is give our nation time to thoughtfully rationalize and restructure management of our vast national energy resources to meet America’s future needs of climate, restoration, multiple use, and revenues. World energy markets are evolving very fast, and we’ll be left far behind if we continue down the same path we’ve been on for half a century. This leasing moratorium will give us room to look ahead and remain competitive in a carbon-constrained economy.

In addition, the new executive order promises serious aid to coal mining, power plant, and oil and gas communities that will be economically challenged by these world market changes, and promises projects to address the problems caused by the thousands of abandoned and orphan oil and gas wells that BLM has failed to deal with in Wyoming in the past.” **Bob LeResche, Powder River Basin Resource Council, Clearmont, Wyoming**

“In the last four years there has been an all-out effort by the BLM to short-circuit its already industry-friendly lease review policies in order to give away as much of the public’s oil and gas resources as operators could absorb. As we anticipate a more responsible administration, it is important to temporarily stop leasing and reestablish meaningful policy before any more resource giveaways. A moratorium on leasing is critical to create space for improvement in leasing rules to fully account for impacts on citizens and the environment, and to properly assess the monetary value of leases prior to resuming any federal leasing.” **Rodger Steen, Chairman of the Western Colorado Alliance’s Oil & Gas Committee, Steamboat Springs, Colorado**

“We're encouraged to see that the administration will take a hard look at our broken coal leasing system. When a private company can buy a ton of coal for less than the price of a cheeseburger, something is seriously wrong. Taxpayers are shortchanged billions of dollars because of this flawed system, the public pays the costs of increased climate change, and coal companies too often leave behind degraded lands that are never properly reclaimed. It’s long past time to revise these corporate-friendly policies and put the public back in the driver’s seat on publicly owned resources.” **Steve Charter, Northern Plains Resource Council board member who ranches above an underground coal mine in Shepherd, Montana**

“A pause in our broken leasing system will allow the administration to reform their ‘oil-and-gas giveaway’ program, protect public health and the environment, and end the corporate monopolization of these lands so ranchers, residents, recreationalists, and wildlife can safely live in the West. The BLM needs to rededicate itself to its multi-use charter after the past four years under an ‘energy dominance’ policy. Given the decade-plus backlog of undeveloped leases and valid permits for federal minerals held by industry, there should be no impact on jobs. At the same time, taxpayer equity should be addressed by reviewing and updating the prices for leases and royalties. Finally, bonding policy should be adjusted for the real cost of plugging wells and remediating sites to ensure it doesn’t fall to us, the taxpayers or owners of split-estate surface, to pay to clean up the mess. **Barbara Vasquez, leader in the Western Organization of Resource Councils, Cowdrey, Colorado**

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The [Western Organization of Resource Councils \(WORC\)](#) is a network of grassroots organizations that span seven of the Western states with more than 18,000 members. Headquartered in Billings, Montana, WORC also has offices in Colorado and Washington, D.C.

The [Powder River Basin Resource Council](#), founded in 1973, is a family agriculture and conservation organization in Wyoming. Resource Council members are family farmers and ranchers and concerned citizens who are committed to conservation of our unique land, mineral, water, and clean air resources.

[Northern Plains Resource Council](#) is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group that organizes Montanans to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

The [Western Colorado Alliance for Community Action](#) brings people together to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development. We are made up of 2,000 members and supporters across Western Colorado. We believe that right now, today, we have the ability and opportunity to create a future where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just and self-reliant.