

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Diverse Coalition of 21 Moves to Defend Biden Administration's Oil, Gas Leasing Pause**  
*Motion backs the Biden administration's legality in pausing federal onshore, offshore leasing*

Cheyenne, WY--Farmers and ranchers, conservation, recreation, and tribal groups [filed motions to intervene today](#) to defend the Biden administration's pause on federal oil and gas leasing pending the Department of Interior's comprehensive review of the program. With this action, the groups seek to defend the leasing pause against [two lawsuits filed by Wyoming](#) and the Western Energy Alliance. The coalition argues this is the legal and necessary first step to a long-overdue review of the federal oil and gas leasing and permitting program.

Earthjustice and the Western Environmental Law Center filed the motions to intervene on behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, Citizens for Healthy Community, Conservation Colorado, Diné Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment, Earthworks, Food & Water Watch, Friends of the Earth, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Indian Peoples' Action, Montana Environmental Information Center, National Parks Conservation Association, Powder River Basin Resource Council, Sierra Club, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Valley Organic Growers Association, Western Colorado Alliance, Western Organization of Resource Councils, Western Watersheds Project, The Wilderness Society, Wilderness Workshop, and WildEarth Guardians.

Separately, other organizations including [business groups](#) are also filing motions to intervene to defend the leasing pause.

***The following are statements from the litigation groups and clients:***

"We as a country cannot stand up and say we are doing something about the climate and the biodiversity crisis while our public lands are responsible for a quarter of all U.S. emissions from fossil fuel extraction and burning," **said Michael Freeman, staff attorney at Earthjustice.** "The Biden administration is correctly exercising its legal authority to pause offshore and onshore oil leasing while it undertakes an overdue and necessary review of the current program."

“The urgency of the climate crisis underscores the need for the federal government to pause oil and gas leasing while it undertakes a comprehensive review of leasing and permitting, and to ensure that public lands management aligns with U.S. climate goals and commitments,” **said Kyle Tisdell, staff attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center.** “The honest hard look at these climate realities, as well as the impacts to our communities and legacy of environmental injustice cannot occur if the federal government were forced to simultaneously continue leasing.”

“After decades of runaway climate pollution, pausing to review the federal fossil fuel programs is long overdue,” **said Taylor McKinnon, senior campaigner at the Center for Biological Diversity.** “The climate and extinction crises demand bold, urgent action. If the Biden administration’s review is done right, and relies on solid science, it’ll show that new fossil fuel leasing isn’t compatible with its goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.”

“We support the Biden administration’s commonsense move to pause new drilling and fracking on public lands. The leasing program must be fully reviewed to assess its contribution to destructive climate change,” **said Eric Huber, Sierra Club managing attorney.** “Oil and gas leasing— and the fossil fuel industry’s locking up of millions of acres of public lands in Wyoming and beyond— prevents uses like recreation, tourism and other sustainable economies that benefit communities far more in the long run.”

“The Department of Interior’s actions pause the looting of public resources by developers accumulating excess leases at bargain basement prices,” **said Bob LeResche, Powder River Basin Resource Council, Clearmont, Wyoming.** “The pause will not harm actual producers, who today hold thousands of acres of undeveloped leased resources. It will give our nation time to rationalize and restructure management of our public energy resources to meet future needs of climate, restoration, multiple use, and revenues.”

“Those of us who live near federal oil and gas development know all too well the ongoing damage this broken system does to our lands, livelihoods, and lungs,” **said Barbara Vasquez, a leader with the Western Organization of Resource Councils** from Cowdrey, Colorado. “Oil and gas executives are the only ones who currently benefit from the continued mismanagement of publicly owned oil and gas resources. The lease pause is essential to allow this administration to complete the decades-overdue review and overhaul of the program.”

“The federal oil and gas leasing system is not working for Americans and has been recklessly damaging our public lands, national parks and climate,” **said Matt Kirby, energy director at the National Parks Conservation Association.** “The decision to hit pause on new leasing is a sensible one that prevents further harm and allows the Biden administration time to finally

reform this system into one that protects our nation's most loved places and paves the way towards a clean energy future that benefits all Americans."

"The Biden-Harris Administration's pause on new leasing and a comprehensive review of the oil and gas program will benefit Western Colorado's people, wildlife, and public lands. Our years of fighting reckless oil and gas leasing in places like the Thompson Divide and the Roan Plateau have made it clear the current system is deeply broken," said **Peter Hart, staff attorney at Wilderness Workshop**. "We'll be working with local communities through this reform process to ensure revised regulations work for the American people and benefit public lands, not just for industry."

"Our nation's federal oil and gas leasing and permitting program is broken, giving handouts to oil and gas companies who have had an oversized seat at the decision-making table for far too long," said **Ben Tettlebaum, senior staff attorney at The Wilderness Society**. "This leasing pause gives the Interior Department much-needed time to transform how we equitably manage our public lands to combat the climate crisis, while allowing the Administration to work with communities to urgently move away from volatile and declining boom-and-bust economies in ways that keep the community and families whole."

"We can't confront the climate crisis and keep selling public lands for fracking," said **Jeremy Nichols, climate and energy program director for WildEarth Guardians**. "The pause on leasing for oil and gas is critical for ensuring the Biden administration and the Interior Department can ultimately put climate first when it comes to managing public lands and minerals."

"This pause is a necessary first step towards fulfilling President Biden's promise to end new oil & gas permitting on public lands," said **Aaron Mintzes, senior policy counsel at Earthworks**. "Business as usual is causing the climate crisis and poisoning our communities."

"The leasing pause is not only within the Administration's legal authority, it is an act of desperately needed leadership," said **Natasha Léger, executive director of Citizens for a Healthy Community**. "A pause on oil and gas leasing is not only common sense, it is the responsible thing to do during the review of an outdated oil and gas leasing and permitting program, which in its current form exploits communities and the American taxpayer, and does nothing to solve the climate, health and ecological crisis we face."

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[Online Version of this Press Release.](#)

**Background:**

The extraction of fossil fuels from our public lands accounts for about 25% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions even though [only about 22% of U.S. oil production and 12% of gas production occurs on federal land and water.](#)

Oil and gas pollution [disproportionately harms](#) low income communities. Air pollution from oil and gas extraction [causes public health harms](#), and long-term exposure to air pollution is [associated with higher COVID-19 mortality rates](#). A pause on oil and gas leasing and re-evaluation of the entire leasing program is a step toward addressing the disproportionate harms on these front-line communities.

In the Trump era, the oil and gas industry stockpiled more than [7,000 federal drilling permits](#)—permits for new drilling [that will take years for industry to complete](#). The industry has also [stockpiled](#) more than 13 million acres of public lands oil and gas leases. That means the oil and gas industry can continue operating as normal for years. Nationally, industry produces oil and gas on [less than half the public lands for which it owns leases](#).

As stated by industry: “We have a deep inventory of approved federal drilling permits in hand that essentially cover all of our desired activity over the next presidential term,” said David Harris, an executive vice president for Devon Energy Corporation, a major leaseholder in New Mexico’s Permian Basin, [on an investor call in October](#) ([Source: High Country News](#)).

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