

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Comments Signed by 115k+ People Submitted to Interior Department Urging Reforms to Federal Oil and Gas Leasing to Protect Public Lands, Oceans, Taxpayers, and Wildlife**

*Western, ocean, and conservation groups emphasize important opportunity to modernize the federal government's antiquated leasing program*

Today, 28 leading conservation, ocean, and western advocacy organizations announced that they have shared more than 115,000 combined signatures with the Department of the Interior in support of their [pause and review](#) of the federal oil and gas leasing program. These signatures were collected in just a few weeks, during this first opportunity to provide feedback to the administration on how they can fix the broken federal leasing system so it works for everyone. The program -- which has been on the U.S. Government Accountability Office's [high risk list](#) of federal programs for a decade and has not been comprehensively reviewed in nearly forty years -- fails to properly protect public lands, coastal and western communities, taxpayers, and wildlife. By working with Congress to implement common-sense reforms, Secretary Deb Haaland and the Biden administration can ensure that the program lives up to the Interior Department's balanced mission, protects taxpayers, and aligns with the Biden administration's climate goals.

The end of the Department's public comment period comes following a March 25 [public forum](#) where Department officials heard from a variety of stakeholders. Participants at the forum repeatedly stated that the program, as currently constructed, does not balance the uses of our nation's public lands, waters, and resources. Reforming the system is popular, too: Western voters [overwhelmingly](#) want oil and gas development on federal public lands to be stopped or strictly limited, not expanded, the [majority](#) of coastal voters oppose new offshore drilling, and the ongoing pause on leasing public lands enjoys [net support](#) from all voters. Recently, more than 50 Gulf-based organizations wrote [a letter](#) to the Biden administration applauding the leasing pause and urging a just transition for Gulf communities.

*The full list of organizations is below a series of quotes.*

"For decades, the oil and gas industry has exerted far too much influence over the way in which our public lands are managed, dismissing the voices and values of our community as responsible stewards of our lands," said **Camilla Simon, Executive Director of Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO)**. "The leasing program has not been updated in decades, putting our community, wildlife, water supplies, and air at risk. This review is long overdue."

"People have witnessed how the dysfunctional oil and gas system has been recklessly damaging our public lands, national parks and climate, and they want to see major reforms and action toward a just and equitable transition to clean energy," said **Matt Kirby, Energy Director at the National Parks Conservation Association**. "There's overwhelming support for protecting the places we love and making crucial progress in meeting ambitious climate targets."

"Those of us who live near oil and gas development thank the Biden Administration for putting a pause on the damage caused by federal oil and gas leasing. The program review must prioritize the health and welfare of impacted communities while conserving public lands for the future generations," said **Barbara Vasquez, a member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils from Cowdrey, Colorado**. "We have witnessed decades of rigged rules result in pollution of our air and water and scars left on our public lands, ranches, and farms. Decades-old lease and royalty rates mean taxpayers have been subsidizing an industry to extract resources that belong to the public. To add insult to injury, speculative and inefficient leasing leaves the public locked out of those public lands even when not producing."

"This long overdue reform of the federal oil and gas leasing system is a critical step to ensure that public lands are part of a just and equitable climate solution, by putting people first," said **Juan Perez, senior manager of strategic partnerships for The Wilderness Society**. "The urgency of the climate crisis does not allow the United States to waste any more time, especially when public lands provide an immediate opportunity for the federal government to take action now."

"Businesses up and down the Atlantic Coast know that expanded offshore oil drilling is a threat to our economy. Our livelihood relies on a healthy ocean and clean beaches to fuel tourism, boating, fishing, recreation and more," said **Tom Kies, President of the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast**. "Offshore drilling puts the roughly 1.75 million jobs the healthy ocean economy supports in danger. That is why the Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast has called on the Biden-Harris administration to permanently protect our coasts by ending all new offshore oil and gas leasing once and for all."

"The Business Alliance for Protecting the Pacific Coast represents over 7,000 businesses working to protect our communities from expanded offshore oil and gas drilling. Our clean coast economy is responsible for over 830,000 jobs that all rely on a healthy ocean and clean coasts and are threatened by dirty and dangerous offshore drilling," said **Vipe Desai, founding member of the Business Alliance for Protecting the Pacific Coast**. "That is why the Business Alliance for Protecting the Pacific Coast is calling on the Biden-Harris administration to end new leasing on the OCS."

"South Carolina's coastal communities have spoken -- we do not want offshore drilling. The Biden Administration is demonstrating a commitment to these concerns by evaluating the broken oil and gas leasing program," said **Rebecca Haynes, Deputy Director of Conservation Voters of South Carolina**. "Now, we urge the Administration and Congress to permanently protect South Carolina's treasured coast - and the families and businesses that depend on it - from dirty and dangerous offshore drilling."

"President Biden's commitment to environmental justice has been praised from frontline communities across the Gulf South," said **Dustin Renaud, Communications Director for Healthy Gulf**. "But that commitment to environmental justice cannot stop with words. We need support on the ground to change the decades-long destruction of our communities from overexploitation of the fossil fuel industry. This is an historic first step, and we are ready to get to work creating a just transition away from dirty energy."

**Organizations:**

Alaska Wilderness League

Business Alliance for Protecting the Atlantic Coast

Business Alliance for Protecting the Pacific Coast  
Colorado Wildlife Federation  
Conservation Voters of South Carolina  
Earthjustice  
Environment America  
Environmental Defense Center  
Friends of the Earth  
Healthy Gulf  
Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO)  
Idaho Wildlife Federation  
Iowa Wildlife Federation  
League of Conservation Voters  
Montana Wilderness Association  
Montana Wildlife Federation  
National Audubon Society  
National Parks Conservation Association  
National Wildlife Federation  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Nebraska Wildlife Federation  
Nevada Wildlife Federation  
Oceana  
Rocky Mountain Wild  
Sierra Club  
South Carolina Wildlife Federation  
Western Organization of Resource Councils  
The Wilderness Society

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