

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Biden administration defends Trump-era decision that fails to account for the costs of pollution from leasing publicly owned coal

A missed opportunity to address climate pollution from the largest coal mining region in the U.S.

Great Falls, Montana — In a [filing late Friday](#), the Biden administration's U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) defended two Trump-era resource management plans (RMPs) that failed to comply with a court order to account for impacts from burning publicly-owned coal, including on public health, and to consider alternatives that limit coal leasing in the Powder River Basin – the largest coal-producing region in the country.

A coalition of conservation groups [filed a brief in support of a motion](#) to order BLM to conduct a new analysis and actually revise the RMPs for the Buffalo and Miles City field offices, as previously ordered by the court. The conservation groups that joined the filing are the Western Organization of Resource Councils, Montana Environmental Information Center, Powder River Basin Resource Council, Northern Plains Resource Council, Center for Biological Diversity, and WildEarth Guardians, and they are represented by attorneys at Earthjustice, Western Environmental Law Center, and Sierra Club.

In response to the BLM's filing, the coalition issued the following statement: "President Biden promised to hold polluters accountable and accelerate the transition to clean and renewable energy. But while the president calls climate change 'code red for humanity,' the administration's BLM is doubling down on Trump-era policies that prop up a dying coal industry at the expense of American taxpayers. Why does the Biden administration want to hide the devastating public health impacts of burning federal coal? And if it cares about fighting climate change, why would it refuse to even consider ways to reduce the mining of publicly owned coal?"

More than 43% of all coal produced in the U.S., and more than 85% of all federal coal produced in the U.S., comes from the Powder River Basin, which stretches more than 13 million acres across Montana and Wyoming.

The Buffalo and Miles City RMPs designate how much coal should be sold to companies and subsequently mined and burned. Almost all coal mined in the region is used for electricity production, making the region the largest single-source of carbon dioxide pollution in the nation.

In 2018, the U.S. Federal District Court for the District of Montana ordered the Trump administration's BLM to revise its RMPs for the Miles City and Buffalo Field Offices because the agency failed to: 1) consider an alternative that reduced the amount of coal available for strip-mining, 2) disclose the impacts of downstream fossil fuel combustion; and 3) disclose the short-term climate impacts of methane emissions.

In 2020, BLM responded to the court's order but again failed to consider the costs of alternatives that would reduce coal strip-mining and to disclose or analyze the impacts of the harmful and toxic non-greenhouse gas pollutants that will result from burning more coal, oil, and gas extracted from public lands.

In October, BLM accepted comments on a comprehensive review of the federal coal program and is expected to announce the next steps of that review in the coming weeks. If BLM is successful in its defense of the Buffalo and Miles City plans, it could make it significantly more difficult for the Biden administration to implement coal reforms stemming from the comprehensive review process.

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About Western Organization of Resource Councils

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.

About the Montana Environmental Information Center

The Montana Environmental Information Center is a member-based nonprofit organization that is dedicated to protecting and restoring the land, air, water, and life-sustaining climate of Montana. MEIC advocates, educates, and empowers people in service of a clean and healthful environment for present and future generations.

About Northern Plains Resource Council

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.

About Powder River Basin Resource Council

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.

About Center for Biological Diversity

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

About WildEarth Guardians

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About Earthjustice

Earthjustice is the premier nonprofit environmental law organization. We wield the power of law and the strength of partnership to protect people's health, to preserve magnificent places and wildlife, to advance clean energy, and to combat climate change. We are here because the earth needs a good lawyer.

About the Western Environmental Law Center

The Western Environmental Law Center uses the power of the law to safeguard the wildlife, wildlands, and communities of the western U.S. in the face of a changing climate. As a public interest law firm, WELC does not charge clients and partners for services. www.westernlaw.org.

About the Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with millions of members and supporters. In addition to protecting every person's right to get outdoors and access the healing power of nature, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit www.sierraclub.org.