

For Immediate Release, May 25, 2017

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Legal Protest Targets Massive Nevada Fracking Plan

June Auction Threatens Water, Wildlife, Public Lands, Climate

LAS VEGAS— Five conservation groups today challenged a U.S. Bureau of Land Management plan to auction nearly 200,000 acres of public lands next month for fossil fuel development.

The [administrative protest](#) asserts that the BLM failed to adequately analyze the impacts of fracking and related industrialization on public lands ecosystems, surface and groundwater, wildlife and the climate.

“This dangerous fracking plan is another example of the Trump administration’s fossil fuel cronyism, and it has no place on America’s public lands,” said Taylor McKinnon with the Center for Biological Diversity. “The lease auction risks irretrievable harm to a huge swath of Nevada’s beautiful wild places. Fracking pollution threatens the state’s precious aquifers and springs, its endangered species and our collective climate future.”

The auction, scheduled for June 14, would open 195,732 acres of public lands in northern Nevada to fracking, including the Big Smoky, Diamond and Railroad valleys, and the Diamond, Fish Creek and Sulphur Creek mountain ranges. Wildlife at risk include mule deer, greater sage grouse, the threatened Railroad Valley springfish and other species that live in springs fed by aquifers threatened by fracking.

The BLM’s original plan, issued under the Obama administration, would have deferred more than 104,000 acres from leasing because of environmental concerns. The BLM under Trump put all that land back into consideration for leasing.

“We won’t allow the oil and gas industry to drill and frack in the Great Basin’s wild and open spaces,” said Bob Fulkerson, state director of the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada. “These corporations, along with other extractive industries like gold mining, put our precious desert water at further risk.”

The protest challenges the BLM’s failure to analyze the environmental impacts of high-volume hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, especially relating to the depletion and pollution

of aquifers and the springs they feed. The groups argue that the Battle Mountain District resource management plan, which was written long before the widespread use of fracking on public land, must be updated prior to new leasing.

“The government’s environmental analysis failed to truly address obvious dangers of leasing these public lands to oil companies,” said John Hadder, director of Great Basin Resource Watch. “Oil and gas extraction is a dirty business that will release toxic chemicals into the air and water upon which communities depend. We urge federal officials to end this irresponsible leasing practice.”

In its environmental analysis for the lease sale, the BLM failed to consider the impact of fracking on wildlife and habitat. In addition, its requirements for fossil fuel companies and other developers are weak, vague and unenforceable, opening the door to the destruction of riparian areas, wetlands, priority sage grouse habitat and big game ranges.

“It’s not just the public that has concerns about this lease sale. Wildlife managers do, too,” said Kelly Fuller, energy campaign coordinator at Western Watersheds Project. “We’ve seen evidence that state and federal agencies asked the BLM to lease fewer acres in order to protect important habitat for sage grouse and other wildlife.”

The protest also challenges the BLM’s failure to adequately consider the greenhouse gas pollution that would result from fracking, and its failure to consider an alternative that would prohibit leasing protect the climate. [Studies](#) have shown that the carbon pollution from new federal fossil fuel leasing is incompatible with U.S. commitments under the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 or 2.0 degrees Celsius.

“An oil and gas lease sale in Nevada ignores the fact that the fossil fuel production industry here is almost a non-entity while Nevada is now developing its abundant solar and geothermal energy resources, providing many times the jobs in renewable energy compared to fossil-fuel energy,” said David von Seggern, chair of the Sierra Club’s Toiyabe Chapter. “We have no need to take the risks involved with fossil-fuel production and distribution.”

Download today’s protest [here](#).