May 23, 2019

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

As Members of the California Congressional Delegation, we write in strong opposition to recent actions taken by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that will make over 2 million acres of land in California available to new oil and gas development. We urge you to immediately reconsider these proposals that expose the state and its citizens to unacceptable risks associated with oil and gas development, and that fly in the face of the public’s desire to protect underground sources of drinking water, mitigate climate change, and safeguard public resources for future generations.

In the span of two weeks the administration announced plans to open over 2 million acres of public and private land to new oil and gas drilling in 18 Counties in California, including Alameda, Contra Costa, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Monterey, San Benito, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Stanislaus, Tulare, and Ventura. These proposed sites are near residential areas, agricultural farm land, fragile drinking water aquifers, as well as protected areas including Sequoia, Kings Canyon, and Yosemite National Parks.

BLM estimates that over 90 percent of new oil and gas wells on public land use hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking”, in conjunction with other destructive extraction techniques as part of the oil and gas development process. For each well, millions of gallons of water are mixed with toxic chemicals, many of which are not publicly disclosed, and injected under high pressure into the well, fracturing the rock and releasing oil and gas. Following the frac, produced water, which is highly salinized water that naturally exists underground alongside oil and gas, flows to the surface where it is collected and stored. Produced water can spill during transport or storage, contaminating groundwater and polluting agricultural lands. Underground injection of produced water is also known to cause earthquakes in numerous regions, an additional risk in a state as seismically active as California.

Of the counties that BLM seeks to open to new oil and gas leasing, Alameda, Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties have all banned fracking or new oil and gas development. It is clear that the administration is moving forward without fully considering the risks and damages to public health and the environment or the will of the people of the state. At a time when California is taking steps to address the climate crisis by electrifying its transportation sector and transitioning to a 100% clean and renewable energy grid, it is inexcusable that the administration would
aggressively and unilaterally seek to open over 2 million acres of land to new oil and gas development.

With U.S. oil production already at an all-time high, we should not be increasing fossil fuel production on these California public lands. Of the federal lands currently leased for oil and gas, more than half are not producing. Once these lands are leased for oil and gas, it blocks them from being used for more sustainable and necessary purposes such as recreation or renewable energy production.

The administration has not adequately measured the public health and environmental impacts of this decision but instead has steamrolled through the process to advance the administration’s narrow goal of catering to the oil and gas industry. We stand with our constituents in opposition to BLM’s plans to open federal lands in California to new oil and gas development.

Sincerely,

Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress

Terry McNearney  
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress

Eric Swalwell  
Member of Congress
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Katie Hill
Member of Congress

Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress

Tony Cardenas
Member of Congress

Brad Sherman
Member of Congress

Pete Aguilar
Member of Congress

Grace Napolitano
Member of Congress

Ted Lieu
Member of Congress

Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
Member of Congress
Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Nanette Barragán
Member of Congress

Harley Rouda
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Jana Vargas
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Katie Porter
Member of Congress

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress