

January 17, 2018
Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

We are writing today to call on the House Committee on Natural Resources to fulfill its duty to engage in meaningful oversight of the administration's stewardship of our nation's irreplaceable public lands, waters and natural resources.

The Trump administration has made expanded energy production a priority for our nation's public lands and waters, especially oil and gas development. This approach manifests in the administration's call for "energy dominance" and a focus on identifying regulatory and other "burdens" on energy producers and land management agencies. In combination, the Trump administration's agenda appears to be a directive to agencies to take any and all steps to ease development access to the multiple use areas owned and managed for the benefit of all Americans—despite the department of the Interior's (DOI) statutory mandate to balance uses—from recreation to energy production.

DOI's push to rapidly expand energy production on public lands and waters has already led to damaging actions, often favored over the findings and recommendations of independent entities, including the Government Accountability Office and DOI's own Inspector General, as well as scientists, local stakeholders and the American people. This includes:

- An inexplicable halt of several independent scientific studies at the National Academies of Science (NAS) designed to protect public health and safety. In December, DOI halted an independent scientific study of offshore oil inspections by the federal safety agency created after the 2010 spill in the Gulf of Mexico that killed 11 people. In August, DOI stopped a study of potential health risks for people living near Appalachian surface coal mines.
- A quixotic review of, and attempts to roll back, commonsense agency actions designed to protect public health, safety and the welfare of local communities, because they may interfere with developing or utilizing the nation's energy resources.
- Advancing the false rhetoric of "energy dominance" as policy strategy, which will likely set DOI on a collision course with its resource protection and stewardship obligations under the multiple use requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.
- A noticeable disregard for public input by eliminating opportunities for public involvement and oversight of management decisions about taxpayer-owned energy resources, paired with the refusal to release data on permitting and production and final decisions that run contrary to the interests and objections of most Americans.
- Action to rescind or weaken rules and policies that address known deficiencies in DOI's fiscal management systems, including the elimination of loopholes and practices like natural gas venting, as recommended by independent auditors.
- The largest single expansion of offshore drilling ever proposed, while attempting to roll back key safety rules put in place to prevent an oil disaster like Deepwater Horizon from taking place.
- In an express contravening of sage grouse plans developed across 10 states and BLM, revoking earlier guidance that actively guides oil and gas leasing and drilling away from critical sage grouse habitat.

- The arbitrary special treatment of a single state's offshore lease sales, in Florida, while other coastal states express similar concerns and objections demonstrates DOI's approach regarding leasing our coastlines is not grounded in science and fails to meet the responsibility to protect our oceans and coastal communities.

We are concerned that the House Natural Resources Committee has not engaged in the appropriate oversight of the noted DOI actions that, in combination, do not adequately fulfill the multiple use mandate of some of the public lands and waters under the department's mission. The committee has held [five] oversight hearings, but examination of the committee record suggests the hearings were designed instead to buttress the administration's management decisions. The American people deserve a more balanced oversight agenda.

The Committee's previous oversight plan plainly states, "Congress has a responsibility to keep the Executive Branch accountable to the American people and ensure that decisions by agencies are open and transparent." We urge the committee to honor this duty and examine the wisdom, propriety and implications of the blizzard of decisions being taken at DOI, many of which are plainly inconsistent with responsibilities placed on DOI by Congress.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns. We appreciate your efforts to better provide oversight of our public lands and waters and the communities and resources they support.

Sincerely,

The Wilderness Society
National Parks Conservation Association
Earthjustice
Wilderness Workshop
Sierra Club
Western Environmental Law Center
Earthworks
Rocky Mountain Wild
Californians for Western Wilderness
Waterkeeper Alliance
Ocean Conservation Research
Los Padres Forest Watch
Rocky Mountain Recreation Initiative
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Alaska Wilderness League
Conejos Clean Water
Conservation Colorado
San Juan Citizens Alliance
Environmental Defense Fund
League of Conservation Voters
Hands Across the Sand / Land
Citizens for a Healthy Community
Institute for Ocean Conservation Science

Power Shift Network
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
EcoFlight
Clean Water Action
Environmental Law Center
Green America
Center for Biological Diversity
New Mexico Sportsmen
KS Wild
Sheep Mountain Alliance
Western Leaders Network
Hip Hop Caucus
Western Watersheds Project
American Bird Conservancy
Natural Resources Defense Council
Wyoming Outdoor Council
Fort Berthold Protectors of Water and Earth Rights
Endangered Species Coalition
Defenders of Wildlife
Partnership for Policy Integrity
Western Organization of Resource Councils
Santa Fe Green Chamber of Commerce