

## Environmentalists deal defeat to fracking in California

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A federal judge sided with environmental groups on Monday and ruled that the Obama administration wrongfully issued oil leases in Monterey County, Calif., by not considering the environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing.

The Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity challenged a September 2011 federal lease sale of about 2,500 acres of land to oil companies that are looking to use hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, to extract oil and gas from the Monterey Shale.

According to the environmentalists, the federal court opinion was the first to explicitly recognize the significant risks and controversies related to fracking.

“This important decision recognizes that fracking poses new, unique risks to California’s air, water, and wildlife that government agencies can’t ignore,” said Brendan Cummings, senior counsel at the Center for Biological Diversity, who argued the case on behalf of the plaintiffs. “This is a watershed moment — the first court opinion to find a federal lease sale invalid for failing to address the monumental dangers of fracking.”

The federal judge did not, however, invalidate the leases, but ordered that the federal government and the environmentalists submit a remedy by April 15. \*\*Both environmental groups want the lease sale to be set aside and, at a minimum, no drilling or fracking to be allowed on the leased lands until the environmental effects have been analyzed.

The Monterey shale formation spans 1,750 acres across central and southern California and is estimated to have 15.4 billion barrels of oil — 64 percent of the country’s total shale oil resources, reports Bloomberg Businessweek.

Fracking involves injecting fluids into cracks in rock formations to widen them and allow more oil and gas to escape, increasing the amounts that can be recovered.

Environmentalists raise concerns over the use chemicals in the fracking process and also argue that fracking has been tied to air and water pollution in other states.

“Fracking for oil and gas is inherently a dirty and dangerous process that decimates entire landscapes,” said Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club. “We know without a doubt that fracking will lead to increased use of fossil fuels at a time when we should be doing everything we can to keep dirty fuels in the ground and doubling down on clean energy.”

Democrats in the California state assembly have already introduced measures to put a moratorium on fracking until state regulators evaluate the public health and environmental effects.

Yet, blocking fracking could prevent the state from realizing huge economic gains. A University of Southern California study found that developing shale resources could generate 2.8 million jobs and \$24.6 billion in government revenues by 2020.

Democratic California Gov. Jerry Brown even expressed enthusiasm over fracking in the state.

“We have 30 million vehicles in California,” Brown said. “We should be reducing it much faster than we are, and hopefully we can get some national policies to do that, but that still doesn’t mean that in the meantime there isn’t oil under the ground in California that can’t be made very useful.”