



HYDRAULIC FRACTURING: Coalition urges BLM to halt Calif. leases until studies are done

Scott Streater, E&E reporter
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A broad coalition of mostly environmental and public health advocates today asked the Bureau of Land Management to cancel all oil and natural gas lease sales on federal lands in the state until after it has finished a broad analysis of the environmental impacts of drilling and the use of hydraulic fracturing.

In May, BLM canceled all oil and gas leases in the state through the fiscal 2013 budget year, which ended Tuesday. That was due to the budget sequester, which forced the agency to prioritize the resources it can commit for oil and gas development on federal lands.

The coalition -- which includes the Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club of California and League of Women Voters of California -- wants the leasing moratorium to continue in the wake of BLM's announcement in the summer that it will conduct a full environmental impact statement for the agency's Hollister Field Office in central California, analyzing the potential impacts of allowing hydraulic fracturing on the 284,000 acres of public land within the field office's jurisdiction (Greenwire, Aug. 2).

BLM has also launched an independent statewide science review of the potential oil and gas drilling impacts on the environment and the general geology of the state, including the

potential seismic impacts of drilling in a state that's constantly under threat of earthquakes. The California Council on Science and Technology is leading that review and plans to publish a peer-reviewed report by early next year.

The coalition sent a two-page letter to BLM California State Director Jim Kenna asking the agency "to extend its current moratorium on oil and gas leases" until the studies are done.

It also asked Kenna to ensure that the agency includes a thorough evaluation of "the full array of environmental and public health impacts of hydraulic fracturing," according to the letter, signed by 100 groups.

"Fracking and other forms of unconventional, risky oil development are putting our air, water, wildlife, health and climate at enormous risk," said Rose Braz, the Center for Biological Diversity's climate campaign director. "New York state has prohibited fracking while the dangers are studied, and the federal government should take the same careful approach on California's beautiful public lands."

But the letter concerns the oil and gas industry, which has been complaining for years about the difficulty of oil and gas development on federal lands across the West.

"This is just another of the ongoing campaigns that the Center for Biological Diversity has been waging on energy production on Califor-

nia for a very long time,” said Tupper Hull, a spokesman for the Western States Petroleum Association in Sacramento.

Hull noted that California last month adopted new regulatory standards for hydraulic fracturing and other unconventional drilling (Energy-Wire, Sept. 23).

CBD has “repeatedly and mistakenly labeled hydraulic fracturing as a dangerous or hazardous activity,” Hull said. “The evidence is overwhelming that it is safe and effective and is in the best interests of California, particularly now that we have the most stringent regulations in the country governing hydraulic fracturing in California.”

But the coalition says BLM has an opportunity to ensure that Californians’ water and air quality is protected by thoroughly studying the issue.

“Due to the wide-ranging dangers of unconventional oil and gas extraction, we strongly urge BLM to extend its current moratorium on oil and gas leases and to thoroughly evaluate the full array of impacts and threats,” it wrote.