

MONTEREY HERALD

Activists to protest plans for potential expansion of fracking

**By Claudia Meléndez Salinas,
Monterey Herald
March 14, 2017**

SEASIDE >> Anti-fracking activists are gearing up to continue fighting against the potential expansion of the oil extraction method, this time against the federal government.

The Bureau of Land Management is hosting meetings this week to discuss plans to lease nearly 800,000 acres of land for oil and gas extraction in 12 California counties, including San Benito. It's an old plan that's returning after the BLM completed a new environmental report that addresses issues challenged with a lawsuit against the agency's previous plan.

"A few years ago, the BLM in California had a plan to lease a few thousand acres of federal land to the oil companies so they could drill for oil," said Hollin Kretzmann of the Center for Biological Diversity. "They neglected to comply with the National Environmental Protection Act. We brought a lawsuit and the court agreed, and they had to go back to the drawing board."

The new plan that addresses the issues raised with the lawsuit was released in early January and it puts in place "new stipulations and best management practices for oil and gas leasing to address wildlife, air quality and water resources and ensure safe and environmentally responsible development," said Serena Baker, a BLM spokeswoman.

"Any conservation areas, wilderness or wilderness study area, would remain closed," said Baker. BLM representatives will hear comments not just on the plan to lease the land for the "preferred use" which is oil and gas exploration, but also other proposed uses.

Anti-fracking activists say those precautions are not enough, especially in these times when the executive branch is planning cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency. Activists are planning to attend the local meetings taking place this week to protest the plans. The first meeting was Tuesday in Coalinga, the second in Hollister, and the third in Salinas.

"Climate change is requiring us to move away from fossil fuel, and BLM is suggesting we go backward and give our lands to the oil industry," Kretzmann said.

The Center for Biological Diversity is co-author of Measure Z, a voter approved initiative that would put limits on oil production practices in Monterey County. The measure is being challenged in court by oil industry giants Chevron and Aera Energy.

Claudia Meléndez Salinas can be reached at 831-726-4370.

If you go

What: BLM public hearing

When: 4 p.m., Wednesday

Where: San Juan Oaks Gold Club, 3825 Union Road, Hollister

When: 4 p.m., Thursday

Where: CSUMB at Salinas City Center, 1 Main St., Salinas

For more information on the Bureau of Land Management Plan: <https://on.doi.gov/2j8Tchm>