



BLM's planned lease sale of 100,000 Colorado acres for drilling prompts legal protest

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The Bureau of Land Management's proposal to auction approximately 100,000 acres of federal public lands in northern Colorado for oil and gas drilling has attracted legal push-back from conservation groups, who say the "massive" lease sale threatens some of Colorado's most treasured and scenic landscapes and wildlife species.

"Fracking these pristine public lands would come at the cost of imperiled wildlife, clean air and clean water, meanwhile worsening climate change," says Michael Saul, senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity.

The Center has joined environmental groups Sierra Club, Living Rivers and the Water-keeper Alliance in filing an administrative protest against the proposed sale, scheduled for Jun 9. The 30-day public protest period has now ended.

BLM Colorado conducts such lease sales quarterly, as required by the Mineral Leasing Act.

In the most recent Colorado sale, in March, 17 parcels totaling 16,447 acres sold for an average of just over \$5.50 per acre. The June sale, as has become standard for BLM lease sales, will be conducted online. Maps detailing the locations of the 106 parcels are available [here](#).

In their complaint, the conservation groups allege that the BLM acknowledged but did not address myriad public comments expressing concern about the proposed sale. They say that the increased drilling activity, particularly horizontal drilling and fracking, will pull water from the Colorado River system and thus increase water scarcity and stress.

The groups also have several complaints with the BLM's environmental assessment, including that its carbon budget analysis is inaccurate and that it fails to analyze significant impacts to wildlife, particularly to sensitive species.

"This massive plan, casually dismissed by the BLM as having 'no significant environmental impact,' will harm a host of sensitive and listed species including Colorado River and greenback cutthroat trout, greater sage grouse, Canada lynx, black-footed ferrets, white-tailed prairie dogs, rare wildflowers, deer, elk and moose," the groups wrote in a statement.

BLM Colorado says it appreciates the input it receives from the public, but would not comment on specific complaints.

According to its website, lease sales are only the first step towards increased drilling.

“Additional planning, environmental analysis and public input must occur before drilling can begin. If drilling occurs, every lease will require reclamation and contain standard terms and stipulations designed to protect air, water, wildlife, and historic and cultural resources,” the site says.

Attorney Michael Saul says that one of the most worrying aspects of the upcoming sale is that it will allow oil and gas leasing in Grand County, which has not yet seen substantial drilling.