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Groups vow to fight opening of 1 million acres to drilling, fracking in California

[Cheri Carlson](#), Ventura County Star Published 3:58 p.m. PT Dec. 17, 2019 | Updated 5:31 p.m. PT Dec. 17, 2019

Environmental groups say they plan to fight a Trump administration decision that cleared the way for new oil and gas leases on more than 1 million acres in California.

The Bureau of Land Management, or BLM, released what's called [a Record of Decision](#) late last week, allowing the agency to resume oil and gas leasing in the state.

The available land spans eight counties, including parts of Ventura County.

The decision stems from a plan that BLM officials released back in 2014. In response to a court order, the agency had to prepare a more thorough analysis of potential impacts of hydraulic fracturing.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, involves pumping chemically treated water into deep rock formations to create or widen cracks and release oil and natural gas.

The BLM also agreed to hold off on any new oil and gas lease sales within the area until that analysis was completed.

The final supplemental environmental report released recently said the BLM found no adverse impacts of hydraulic fracturing that could not be alleviated.

Several groups and state officials, however, disagree and have called the analysis flawed. California Attorney General Xavier Becerra has said the review [failed to fully evaluate](#) the project's impact on the communities and environment.

"We've got concerns about the analysis and we'll be fighting this every way that we can," said Clare Lakewood, climate legal director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

The area slated for potential drilling and fracking is near parks, forests, wildlife refuges and Carrizo Plain National Monument. It's also home to threatened and endangered wildlife, including San Joaquin kit foxes and California condors, according to a coalition of groups opposed to the plan.

Los Padres ForestWatch [posted an interactive map](#) of the available areas.

"Fracking and other development on or near lands that are set aside specifically to protect threatened wildlife, critical water supplies, and rare ecosystems will cause significant impacts," said ForestWatch Executive Director Jeff Kuyper.

[Thursday's signed decision](#) does not in itself mean new leases will be issued or permits approved. Federal officials said any potential new leases or requests for permits would go through a subsequent environmental analysis.

Permit applications also would need state approval. Last month, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced additional regulations in California, halting approval of fracking permits until independent scientists could review them.