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News

California Central Coast, Bay Area to Open for Drilling (1)

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- BLM plan allows for fracking and development across 725,000 acres
- Oil derricks will appear in some of state's most beautiful areas, environmental group says

A more than five-year moratorium on leasing land in California for oil and gas development will be coming to an end with a May 9 Interior Department plan to open up about 725,000 acres across the state's Central Coast and the Bay Area for drilling.

The decision comes just two weeks after the Trump administration released its [plan](#) to reopen more than 1 million acres of public land and federal mineral estate in eight counties in Central California to fracking.

The Bureau of Land Management's preferred alternative in the [proposed resource management plan and final environmental impact statement](#), which will be published in the Federal Register May 10, will allow for leasing with controlled surface stipulations on about 683,000 acres of mineral estate, and on another 42,400 acres of minerals that have to be accessed with horizontal drilling since equipment isn't allowed on the surface directly above.

About 67,500 acres of federal minerals would be closed to leasing in designated wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, and national monuments within the region, the bureau said.

Energy Development

The decision supports the administration's goals of promoting environmentally responsible development of oil and gas on public lands, creating jobs and providing economic opportunities for local communities, said the BLM, which is part of Interior.

The BLM has not held a single lease sale in California since 2013, when a court [ruled](#) the agency violated the National Environmental Policy Act and the Mineral Leasing Act by issuing leases in Monterey and Fresno counties without considering the risks of fracking, according to the Center for Biological Diversity, the plaintiff in that case.

The proposed resource management plan and final environmental impact statement fulfills the agency's commitment to the 2013 court order to prepare a more detailed environmental analysis of oil and gas leasing and the potential impacts of fracking and other drilling techniques, BLM said. The bureau will use the final impact statement to issue or re-issue some or all of the 14 leases subject to the court's decision.

"From Monterey to the Bay Area, the president wants to let oil companies drill and spill their way across our beloved public lands and wildlife habitat," said Clare Lakewood, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. "As we fight climate chaos, there's no justification for any new drilling and fracking, let alone this outrageous assault on our pristine wild places."

The California Council on Science and Technology in 2015 said fracking in California "happens at unusually shallow depths, dangerously close to underground drinking water supplies, with unusually high concentrations of toxic chemicals," the group said.

The publication of the plan and final environmental impact statement begins a 30-day protest period and 60-day governor's consistency review.

Kathleen Sgamma, president of the Western Energy Alliance, pointed out the extensive process involved with public lands leasing, and that this plan is the culmination of activity begun during the Obama administration.

"There's a lot of process when it comes to public lands planning, which can take several years spanning multiple administrations," she said in an email. "Western Energy Alliance is pleased that all the process and analysis is finally nearing an end."