

<https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-central-california-oil-gas-drilling-expansion-20190509-story.html>

Trump to expand oil and gas drilling in Central California

In the Trump administration's latest effort to increase oil and gas drilling on federal land, it announced finalized plans Thursday to open 725,500 acres along California's Central Coast to fossil fuel exploration.

The Bureau of Land Management's plans encompass a region spanning 11 counties — stretching from the Pacific coast to the San Joaquin Valley — but most of the affected land is in Fresno, Monterey and San Benito counties.

Under its proposal, 683,100 acres of federal mineral estate managed by the agency would be opened to oil and gas drilling.

Another 42,400 acres would have restrictions prohibiting surface-level equipment such as pumpjacks. These rules would apply to land within the 8,000-acre Joaquin Rocks area, the Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area in Fresno County and the core population areas of the endangered giant kangaroo rat.

Bureau spokeswoman Serena Baker said that most of the wells would likely be drilled in or near existing oil fields. The agency estimates that 37 new oil and gas wells will be developed within the next 20 years.

The agency's plan comes only weeks after the administration detailed its plans to open more than 1 million acres of public and private land in other parts of California to oil and gas drilling. Together, the proposals target nearly 1,737,000 acres across 19 California counties.

Environmentalists criticized the latest plan as a giveaway to oil and gas companies.

“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 environmental advocacy group 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.”

Environmentalists warn that any new drilling in California will only worsen the impacts of climate change. They want Gov. Gavin Newsom to ban new oil and gas drilling on state-owned land. At the national level, they have filed rafts of lawsuits against the Trump administration, hoping to tangle up the president’s policy of American “energy dominance” in years of court proceedings.

In addition to fear over the worsening climate crisis, these groups say they are concerned that increased drilling activity could worsen air quality in parts of the state where it is already polluted.

They also worry that fracking, an oil production technique used in some federally-leased oil and gas wells, could increase the likelihood of earthquakes on faults that have not shown signs of activity for years. Scientists have linked the dramatic increase in earthquakes in Oklahoma to fracking.

If the administration is ultimately able to open thousands of acres to drilling, it would mark the end of a five-year moratorium on leasing federal land in California to oil and gas developers. The bureau has not held a lease sale in California since 2013.

