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# Biden to Bar Oil & Gas Drilling on Federal Lands

January 26, 2021 **BRANDI BUCHMAN**

*Drill, baby, drill? Not so fast. President Biden is expected to announce an executive order on Wednesday that will bring new oil and gas permits on federal lands to a halt, putting climate change front and center.*

WASHINGTON (CN) — President Joe Biden is readying a moratorium on new leases for oil and gas drilling on federal lands.

Existing permits would be allowed to continue under the administration's directive, according to a Washington Post report this morning that quoted three officials with intimate knowledge of the order Biden will likely issue in the next 24 hours.

The same executive order is expected to also stand up a task force aimed at assessing the federal government's plans to reduce carbon emissions nationwide, and to make the issue of climate change a national security priority. Labeling it as such falls in line with [widely accepted wisdom](#) from climate and defense experts alike who have linked rising greenhouse gases to threatened food and water security, higher rates of refugeeism, and greater likelihood of conflict, territorial or otherwise.

The New York Times reported Tuesday that the order may also direct the federal government to begin conserving at least 30% of all federal lands and waterways no later than 2030.

On the campaign trail, Biden had vowed to ban new permitting for oil and gas development on public lands and waters. The gesture was welcomed by environmentalists though it raised criticism from fossil fuel industry giants. Groups like the American Petroleum Institute argue that freezing development ultimately curbs funding for conservation efforts by squelching state tax revenues needed to boost local economies.

The Bureau of Land Management has leased roughly 26.3 million acres to developers, bringing states more than \$8 billion in royalty revenues last year, according to Interior Department reports.

In addition to environmental justice and climate advocacy organizations, indigenous groups have lauded the expected ban on new leases. More than 500 organizations headquartered all over the United States sent a [letter](#) to then President-elect Biden in December effectively outlining what the ideal executive order would look like.

Reports about the impending order show that it could be modeled, at least in part, on what the groups recommended late last year. One recommendation was for a comprehensive review to be launched on existing leases. The groups wanted the administration to explore potential fraud or possible misrepresentations by leaseholders on the climate assessment or impact reports they compiled in order to secure their lease to start.

The White House did not immediately return request for comment.

Among tribes that have expressed apprehension about a ban on drilling, however, the chair of the Ute Indian Tribe Business Commission issued a [scathing letter](#) to the White House last week when President Biden

announced a temporary suspension on active oil and gas leases for U.S. lands and waters for 60 days. Wednesday's order is similar to that one but goes a few steps further.

"Indian lands are not federal public lands," the Ute business chair Luke Duncan wrote. "Any action on our lands and interests can only be taken after effective tribal consultation."

Duncan called Biden's Day 1 halt to leasing a "direct attack" on the tribe's "economy, sovereignty and our right to self-determination."

For other tribes, however, the risk is proven to outweigh the reward.

"The waters of the Gulf of Mexico are being polluted, which is throwing all life out of balance. Rapid expansion by the fossil fuel industry threatens our coastal communities and our ways of living," Juan Mancias, tribal chairman of the Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe of Texas, said in a statement Tuesday. "The Deepwater Horizon disaster showed the damage even a single spill can do to our waters and the environment — it's time to end new leases for oil and gas."

Wednesday's order will also include direction to federal agencies on how much land should be flagged just for renewable energy production.

Some 1 million acres of public lands opened to fracking by the Trump administration are already in the middle of a legal battle after two nonprofits brought a [federal complaint](#) last week in Washington to halt the sale of public lands in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

Representing WildEarth Guardians and Physicians for Social Responsibility, attorney Shiloh Hernandez with the Western Environmental Law Center accused the Trump administration of using land grabs as a means to cede public lands to the oil and gas industry.

Lawsuits from conservationists led federal courts to stop the Trump administration from opening up multiple tracts to developers in the last 18 months of the Trump administration. Some 300,000 acres up for sale in Wyoming were taken off the auction block, while the sale for another million acres spanning Nevada, Utah and Wyoming was also blocked in early 2020. About 150,000 acres of land sold for fracking in Montana was also reversed last May, and just last month U.S. District Judge David Barlow [overturned the sale](#) of 60,000 acres in Utah by the Bureau of Land Management.

Rebuffing arguments against the ban, Taylor McKinnon, a senior campaigner at the Center for Biological Diversity, argued that the world cannot afford to sacrifice one more acre to fossil fuel development amid the climate crisis brought on by excessive carbon emissions.

“There are already more fossil fuels being developed in the world than can be safely burned,” McKinnon said in a statement Tuesday. “It’s time to stop expanding fossil fuel extraction and begin phasing it out altogether. We’re looking forward to President Biden taking this important first step.”