



October 12, 2021

Deb Haaland  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

**Re: We Need Your Climate Leadership, Stop Ignoring the Law, Pause Oil and Gas Leasing**

Dear Secretary Haaland:

WildEarth Guardians thanks you for your leadership on climate, public lands, and environmental justice. Your appointment as Secretary of the Interior has given new hope that people and our planet matter first in the management of lands and minerals.

Unfortunately, that hope is eroding in the face of new plans by the Department of the Interior to offer more nearly 750,000 acres of American public lands for sale to the oil and gas industry in early 2022. These plans do not only contradict the Interior Department's stated [commitment to climate action](#) and environmental justice, they are illegal.

For years, WildEarth Guardians has been at the forefront of exposing the true climate costs of federal oil and gas management and holding the Interior Department accountable to science and the law. It is well accepted that selling public lands for oil and gas extraction is scientifically unjustified in an era when the transition away from fossil fuels is the only chance we have of preventing the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

It is also well understood that selling public lands to the oil and gas industry is patently illegal. We've proven that. In lawsuit after lawsuit challenging the Bureau of Land Management's attempts to sell millions of acres of public lands in the western U.S., we've consistently won.

In case after case, courts have found the Interior Department inappropriately rejected facts, ignored legal duties, and abused its discretion to deny the oil and gas industry's demands.

Late last month a federal judge in Colorado rejected more than 58,000 acres of oil and gas leases sold in northwest Colorado—an area of nearly 100 square miles—near Dinosaur National Monument. In a suit we brought together with a coalition of partner organizations,

we exposed the Bureau of Land Management ignored “evidence of reasonably foreseeable environmental effects” and did not engage in “informed decisionmaking.” See *Rocky Mountain Wild, et al. v. David Bernhardt, et al.*, Case No. 18-02468 (D. Colo. Sept. 28, 2021).

This ruling comes on the heels of a wave of courtroom defeats by the Interior Department over the years, including:

- ***WildEarth Guardians v. Zinke*, 368 F. Supp. 3d 41 (D.D.C. 2019)**, in which the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C. held the Interior Department illegally ignored the climate consequences of selling more than 300,000 acres of public lands in Wyoming and by extension more than 150,000 acres of lands in Colorado and Utah oil and gas extraction.
- ***Western Watersheds Project v. Zinke*, 18-00187 (D. Idaho Feb. 27, 2020)**, in which the U.S. District Court in Idaho held the Interior Department illegally ignored the consequences of selling more than 1.0 million acres of public lands in Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming to imperiled wildlife like the sage grouse.
- ***WildEarth Guardians v. U.S. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 457 F. Supp. 3d 880 (D. Mont. 2020)**, in which the U.S. District Court in Montana held the Interior Department illegally ignored the climate and clean water consequences of selling 150,000 acres of public lands in Montana for oil and gas extraction.
- ***WildEarth Guardians v. Bernhardt*, No. 20-00056 (D.D.C. Oct. 23, 2020)**, in which the U.S. District Court agreed with a request by the Trump administration to reject the sale of 1.8 million acres of lands for oil and gas extraction in Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.
- ***WildEarth Guardians v. Bernhardt*, No. 16-1724-RC (D.D.C. Nov. 13, 2020)**, in which the U.S. District Court in Washington D.C. again held the Interior Department illegally ignored the climate consequences of selling public lands in the western U.S. for oil and gas extraction.
- ***Rocky Mtn. Wild v. Bernhardt*, No. 19-00929 (D. Utah Dec. 10, 2020)**, in which the U.S. District Court in Utah held the Interior Department illegally failed to consider rejecting the sale of 60,000 of public lands in Utah for oil and gas extraction.

This court record is indefensible.

In spite of this, the Interior Department continues to defend illegal leasing in court and now proceeding to approve new leasing. In fact, right now, your department remains a defendant in no fewer than six additional federal lawsuits challenging the sale of more than 3.0 million acres of public lands for oil and gas extraction in California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.

As Interior Secretary, you have complete and unbridled discretion to decide when and where it's appropriate to lease public lands for oil and gas extraction. This discretion is unquestioned. No federal court has ever held the Secretary of the Interior lacks discretion to

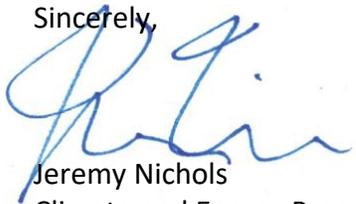
say “no” to the oil and gas industry. No federal court has ever ordered the Secretary to lease against her will and authority.

While we’re prepared to go back to federal court over any new oil and gas leasing approved by the Interior Department, we are sick and tired of litigating for the climate. At a time when the climate crisis is wreaking havoc on our planet and our communities, we should not be forced to continue to waste valuable time, resources, and energy to fight for truth and reality.

We’ve successfully sued former Presidents Obama and Trump. We will not hesitate to sue President Biden if we have to. However, in all honesty, the last thing we want to do is name you, Deb Haaland, as a Defendant in yet another lawsuit over oil and gas leasing on public lands.

When you were confirmed as Secretary of the Interior, our organization – and many others who have dedicated their professional and personal lives to preserving our climate – [celebrated](#). We took it as a signal that finally we had the right person for the job at the right time. Please be the climate leader we know you are. Stop defending and perpetuating decisions to open more public lands for oil and gas extraction. Put science, the law, and justice first. Use your authorities and discretion to pause new oil and gas leasing and put our nation on track for a just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels. Should you take this path, we will be behind you every step of the way. Thank you.

Sincerely,



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