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# Earth Action: Stop New Drilling Leases on Public Lands



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Earth911 is honoring the 52 years of Earth Day with [52 Actions for the Earth](#). Each week through Earth Day 2023, we will share an action you can take to [invest in the Earth](#) and make your own life more sustainable. This week, one small action you can take for the Earth affects several big issues – reduction of carbon emissions, protection of public lands, and politician accountability. Let politicians know you oppose drilling for fossil fuels on public lands.

**Action: Sign [the petition](#) to ban new oil and gas permits on public lands and waters**

**Producing Fossil Fuels on Public Lands**

## What Do You Think?

**Are you considering moving because of climate change?**

- No
- I'm researching my options to decide
- Yes

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[Public lands](#) are held by the government and managed <sup>CLOSE</sup> for the public good. But not all public lands are parks, and the public good is not always defined as “preservation” or even “conservation.” The Bureau of Land Management manages about 700 million acres (30% of the United States) — land whose use is often determined by the value of its [“onshore subsurface mineral estate.”](#) According to BLM, as of 2018, some 26 million of those acres are under lease to oil and gas developers, with about 13 million acres in active production. Between 5-10% of all oil and natural gas production in the United States comes from these public lands. Fossil fuels extracted from federal lands account for [nearly one-quarter](#) of carbon emissions in the U.S.

## Broken Promises?

President Biden promised on the campaign trail that he would “ban new oil and gas permitting on public lands and waters.” Once in office, Biden did [pause quarterly sales](#) of federal oil and gas drilling leases for a while. Even [during the 15-month pause](#) in lease sales, oil production on federal lands increased, with domestic oil production reaching a near-record high in 2021. But instead of banning future sales, those lease sales resumed in July 2022 after months of rising gas prices and a [court order](#).

[No one was happy](#) about the way the leases were resumed. Only about 20% of the public land industry hoped for went up for auction, while royalty rates increased by 50%. Overall, industry claims that [changes to the system](#) create new barriers discouraging companies from investing in public lands drilling. Meanwhile, environmental groups filed a lawsuit to stop the lease sales entirely. But even if the lawsuit is successful (which is far from a given) it will take years to resolve.

At the heart of a tangle of lawsuits for and against drilling on public lands is the question of presidential authority. The court order in February of 2022 related to the [climate cost estimate](#) metric that is used in lease reviews. The previous president cut the number to a negligible amount. On his first day in office, Biden restored it. Fifteen months later, in a ruling that [has been described](#) as “legally incoherent” and “deeply flawed,” a judge claimed the president does not have the authority to make such a change.

## Petition Against Drilling

Biden’s actions so far indicate an intent to keep his campaign promise. But communicating with elected officials serves more purposes than simple scolding. Letters and [petitions](#) let elected officials know when there is public support for a course of action. Widespread, vocal support for the end of drilling on public lands will encourage the administration to continue pursuing all available methods to keep its campaign promises.

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