

November 7, 2022

Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1843 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Tracy Stone-Manning
Director
U.S. Bureau of Land Management
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

RE: Request for Public Hearings and for an Extension of the Public Comment Periods for the Proposed 2023 Oil and Gas Lease Sales in Kansas, New Mexico, and Wyoming

Dear Secretary Haaland and Director Stone-Manning:

Our organizations respectfully request that you hold public hearings and extend the deadlines for public comment on the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's proposed oil and gas leasing for Kansas, New Mexico, and Wyoming.

Our organizations represent millions of members and supporters throughout the country who care deeply about public lands and stand to be impacted by any further oil and gas development of these lands. Our organizations ask that you extend the public comment period on each of the lease sales by a minimum of 45 days to ensure meaningful public involvement, including Tribal consultation and public hearings.

The current 30-day comment period for two oil and gas lease sales, covering more than 260,000 acres in three states, is unreasonable and fails to provide the public an adequate opportunity to review the proposed leases and to share feedback on the Bureau of Land Management's analysis of environmental impacts. The deadlines for submitting comments on both lease sales fall on the same day. This is not a meaningful opportunity for public comment.

The proposed lease sales stand to impact a range of environmental justice, public health, natural resource, and wildlife issues, but chief among these issues is the existential imperative to limit climate change to 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming. The actions the Bureau of Land Management may take based on them have serious implications for the United States, and all

countries of the world, to prevent 1.5 degrees Celsius of additional warming—warming beyond which scientists predict catastrophic harm to people, ecosystems, and species worldwide. With so much at stake, 30 days for the public to review and provide comment is insufficient.

The serious implications and highly controversial nature of the proposed lease sales warrant a more thorough opportunity for public review and input, especially given the size and extent of the proposed sales. The proposed leases in Wyoming would impact public lands in all four corners of the state. The proposed leasing in New Mexico and Kansas would impact lands that have never been developed for oil and gas. Accordingly, our organizations respectfully request that, at a minimum, the comment deadline for the proposed lease sales be extended by a minimum of 45 days. The additional time will ensure the public—including environmental justice communities whose views on this type of development have historically been overlooked and who will be the first to feel the impacts of these sales—have an opportunity to meaningfully review and provide comments for each of the states considering new oil and gas leasing.

In conjunction with an extension of the comment period, we further request the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Land Management hold public hearings on the proposed oil and gas leasing. As part of its environmental reviews, the agencies must “[m]ake diligent efforts to involve the public in preparing and implementing [its] NEPA procedures.” 40 C.F.R. § 1506.6(a). To this end, the agencies are obligated to “[h]old or sponsor public hearings or public meetings whenever appropriate[.]” *Id.* § 1506.6(c). It is appropriate to hold public hearings or meetings where there is substantial environmental controversy concerning the proposed actions or substantial interest in holding the hearing. The Bureau of Land Management’s duty to hold public hearings around its actions is also set forth in the agency’s NEPA Handbook H-1790-1 at Section 6.9.1

To this end, we request the agency hold public hearings at a location or locations that are convenient to the impacted public and we request the Bureau provide Spanish translation services. We note that the current notices of the proposed lease sales are not posted in Spanish or otherwise available in a translated format.

The Bureau of Land Management has legal discretion to extend the public comment period and hold public hearings for its proposed oil and gas leasing. The Department of the Interior itself has committed to “exercise the authority and discretion provided under the law to conduct leasing in a manner that takes into account the program’s many deficiencies.” *See* <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/interior-department-issues-statement-oil-and-gas-leasing-program>. The agencies have the authority and discretion under the National Environmental Policy Act to ensure meaningful public involvement, including Tribal consultation and public hearings, prior to moving forward with any new oil and gas leasing.

We look forward to your prompt response to our request for public hearings and an extension of the comment period. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this request further, please feel free to contact:

Jeremy Nichols, WildEarth Guardians
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303-437-7663

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Respectfully,

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Community Organizer
Citizens Caring for the Future

Joan Brown
Executive Director
Interfaith Power and Light New Mexico & El Paso region

Matthew Henderson
Executive Director
OLÉ Education Fund

Julia Bernal
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Debbie Thornburg James
Board Member
Mayfair Park Neighborhood Association Board

Rachael Lehman
Healthy Communities Chair
Interstate 70 Citizens Advisory Group

Cc: Melanie Barnes, New Mexico State Office Director, Bureau of Land Management
Andrew Archuleta, Wyoming State Office Director, Bureau of Land Management