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Groups to New Mexico BLM: Put People Over Polluters During COVID-19

Indigenous, Environmental, and Community Groups and Representatives Call on Agency to Stop Sacrificing Public Lands for Fracking, Join Americans in Putting Health First

DATE

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IN THIS RELEASE

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In a [letter to the New Mexico Bureau of Land Management Director](#), the groups, representing over two million members, highlighted the fact that virtually all New Mexican lives have been seriously disrupted as the COVID-19 crisis has grown, preventing the public and tribal governments from meaningful engagement in the agency's management of public lands and resources.

In spite of the outbreak of novel coronavirus in the United States and Governor Lujan Grisham's [stay-at-home order](#), the New Mexico Bureau of Land Management continues to move forward with plans to sell public lands for fracking, rollback environmental safeguards, adopt new plans for the management of public lands and resources, and authorize private development.

In their letter today, groups demanded the Bureau of Land Management suspend these actions, stating, "As the world turns to manage an unexpected crisis, the BLM should not be leveraging the public quarantine to sacrifice more of our public lands, health and safety, and air and water resources to the oil and gas industry."

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requests from the NM Congressional Delegation and the All Pueblo Council of Governors for suspension. The BLM had promised it would hold public hearings on its proposal, but the public is anticipating another broken promise.

Unfazed by record low oil prices, the BLM refuses to relent on the Trump's Administration's "energy dominance agenda," recklessly pushing forward with its proposal to sacrifice 50,000 acres of public land for fracking during its May lease sale, and steadily rubber stamping more drilling permits in both northwest and southeast New Mexico.

The groups explained, "Low-wealth communities and communities of color, including Indigenous communities, are being disproportionately harmed by this emergency, and these communities are also on the frontlines of oil and gas extraction in New Mexico. In the midst of the public health and economic emergency caused by the COVID-19 crisis, we urge you to protect the most vulnerable New Mexicans from the dangers and insecurity that result from the public health crisis, not take advantage of our inability to engage in BLM decision making."

The Bureau of Land Management's response to the COVID-19 crisis has so far been muted. The agency has issued no

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is the time to protect communities, not exploit them.”

Additional Statements:

“The BLM has a duty to suspend all public hearings, comment periods, and lease sales to ensure those who are most affected by oil and gas development are afforded equal opportunity to provide input on development that occurs in their communities. Indigenous communities have the added challenges of poor communication infrastructure, thus frustrating their ability to access and participate in the BLM leasing process, especially during these difficult times while they attempt to promote social distancing measures to ensure their personal and community safety.” – Carol Davis, Executive Director for **Dine C.A.R.E.**, (928) 679-5045, davis@dine-care.org

“In light of the Coronavirus Pandemic, the New Mexico State Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and all Field and District Offices within New Mexico should suspend all open public comment periods, planning processes needing public input, and policy development also needing the public input. You must understand that public open meetings and public comment periods are a part of our American Democracy. Please

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“It is only just that any efforts (whether they be bureaucratic or extractive) to move forward with plans for further assault on our lands and bodies from the BLM be immediately suspended until the virus is no longer a pandemic. Our Peoples and Nature deserve reprieve and healing in this time of vulnerability.” – Beata Tsosie and Kathy Sanchez, Environmental Health and Justice Program for **Tewa Women United**, (505) 747-3259, beata@tewawomenunited.org, kathy@tewawomenunited.org

“It is unconscionable for BLM to be propping up polluters during a public health pandemic. Rolling back pollution controls will only exacerbate health issues; urgently, the agency must put public health first and halt the rubber stamping of more fracking approvals.” – Rebecca Sobel, Senior Campaigner for **WildEarth Guardians**, (267) 402-0724, rsobel@wildearthguardians.org

“Global oil demand is falling dramatically — the first full-year decline in more than a decade. While the continuing projected downturn relates in some part to fallout from the outbreak of COVID-19, it is also tied to more persistent, structural issues weighing against oil production, like slowing economic growth and OPEC members’ decision to increase overall output and

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Director for **New Energy Economy**, (505) 989-7262,
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“In the midst of a public health crisis, all focus must be on protecting our citizens. It is impossible to participate in a public input process, especially one that disproportionately affects low-income people who are likewise unequally impacted by COVID-19. The BLM must postpone these public participation processes until the public can participate!” – Shelley Silbert, Executive Director for **Great Old Broads for Wilderness**, (970) 385-9577, shelley@greatoldbroads.org

“The coronavirus outbreak is changing everything – rapidly. Plummeting oil prices are likely to lead to a collapse of the fracking industry here, stranding New Mexicans with a toxic legacy of abandoned wells and infrastructure. Restraint is wise.” – Mark LeClaire, Organizer for **We Are One River**, weareoneriver@gmail.com

“In the midst of an unprecedented crisis, while Americans are concerned with a pandemic that threatens the health of their families, jobs, and communities, the BLM continues to sell off federal land for oil and gas development. BLM land is OWNED by us, the citizens of the United States. It is our land, our

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these federal lease sales immediately.” – Margaret Wadsworth, Senior Organizer for **Food and Water Watch**, (505) 750-2980, mwadsworth@fwwatch.org

“It is critical that public lands are enjoyed in perpetuity. The BLM Director must take the long view for which he is personally responsible as a public elected servant. Otherwise consequences to us and future children will be harmed.” – Peggy Baker, Board Member **Rio Arriba Concerned Citizens**, (925) 890-2435

“In light of the ongoing public health crisis, it is vital for the BLM to suspend all open public comment periods, planning processes, and policy development. Individuals and communities responding to COVID-19 do not have the ability during this crisis to participate in non-essential life-saving activities. The exploitation of people and communities during a pandemic is outright immoral. Now is the time to back off BLM business-as-usual and allow everyone to focus on what is important – the well-being and lives of all Americans.” – Delese Dellios, Campaign Coordinator for **350 New Mexico**, (505) 688-5343, delese@350newmexico.org

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McKinnon, Senior Public Lands Campaigner for **Center for Biological Diversity**, (801) 300-2414, tmckinnon@biologicaldiversity.org

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