

The Case to Ban Fracking on Federal Lands

The United States has a long history of auctioning our public lands and waters to oil and gas companies, threatening climate stability and nationally treasured wilderness. As we continue to fight for our planet, it is imperative we stop additional development. The majority of Americans oppose further developing oil and gas resources and want to see an end to drilling on public lands.¹

Our Public Lands Are No Place for Fracking

Fracking is an oil and gas extraction method which pollutes our environment, threatens public health, and contributes to climate chaos.² Despite the risks, 95 percent of the country's oil and gas is extracted through fracking, and about 90 percent of the wells on public and tribal lands are fracked.³ While concerns about climate change escalate, the federal government continues to open our public lands and waters to oil and gas development.

The State of Federal Leasing and Drilling

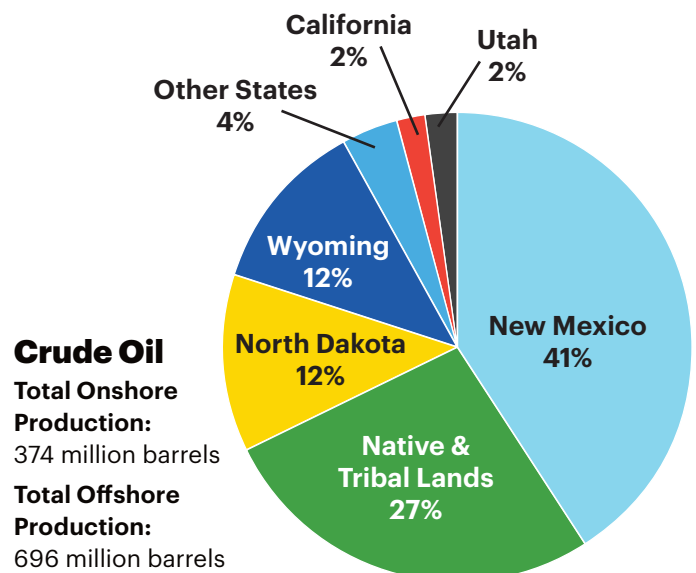
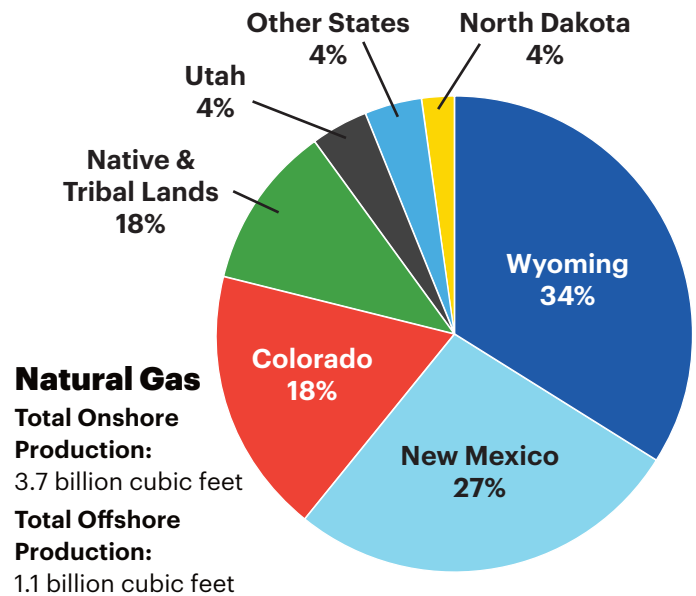
Twelve percent of natural gas and 24 percent of crude oil were extracted from federal lands and waters in 2019.⁴ In 2018, oil and gas companies were leasing over 25 million acres of public land; 13 million acres were producing oil and gas.⁵ Our federal waters have also been handed to these industries. By the end of 2020, the government was managing leases in federal waters spanning over 12 million acres – 2.5 million acres were producing oil and gas.⁶

Drilling permit applications skyrocketed during the Trump administration, increasing more than 300 percent from 2017 to 2018; then approvals soared to over 4,700 permits in 2020 – comparable to the early 2000s when oil was double current prices.⁷ Over one million acres of public lands were leased for just \$2 an acre⁸ – an obscenely low price. Companies also began stockpiling drilling permits in 2020 to try to undermine buzz that the Biden Administration may ban fracking on public lands.⁹

Still, a ban on fracking and drilling on federal lands would be impactful in states where large swaths of public land are used for drilling,¹⁰ like New Mexico and Wyoming.

Industry estimates a ban on oil and gas development on federal lands and waters would only decrease overall fracked oil and gas production by about 8 and 4 percent, respectively.¹¹ But in states like New Mexico, where around half of oil and gas production occurs on federal lands, a fracking ban could go a long way. In Wyoming, 80 percent of the gas extracted in 2019 was from federal lands.¹²

Figure 1: Natural Gas and Crude Oil Production on Federal Lands, 2019¹³



Both pie charts represent onshore production only.

The Climate Plan Must Stop Drilling on Public Lands

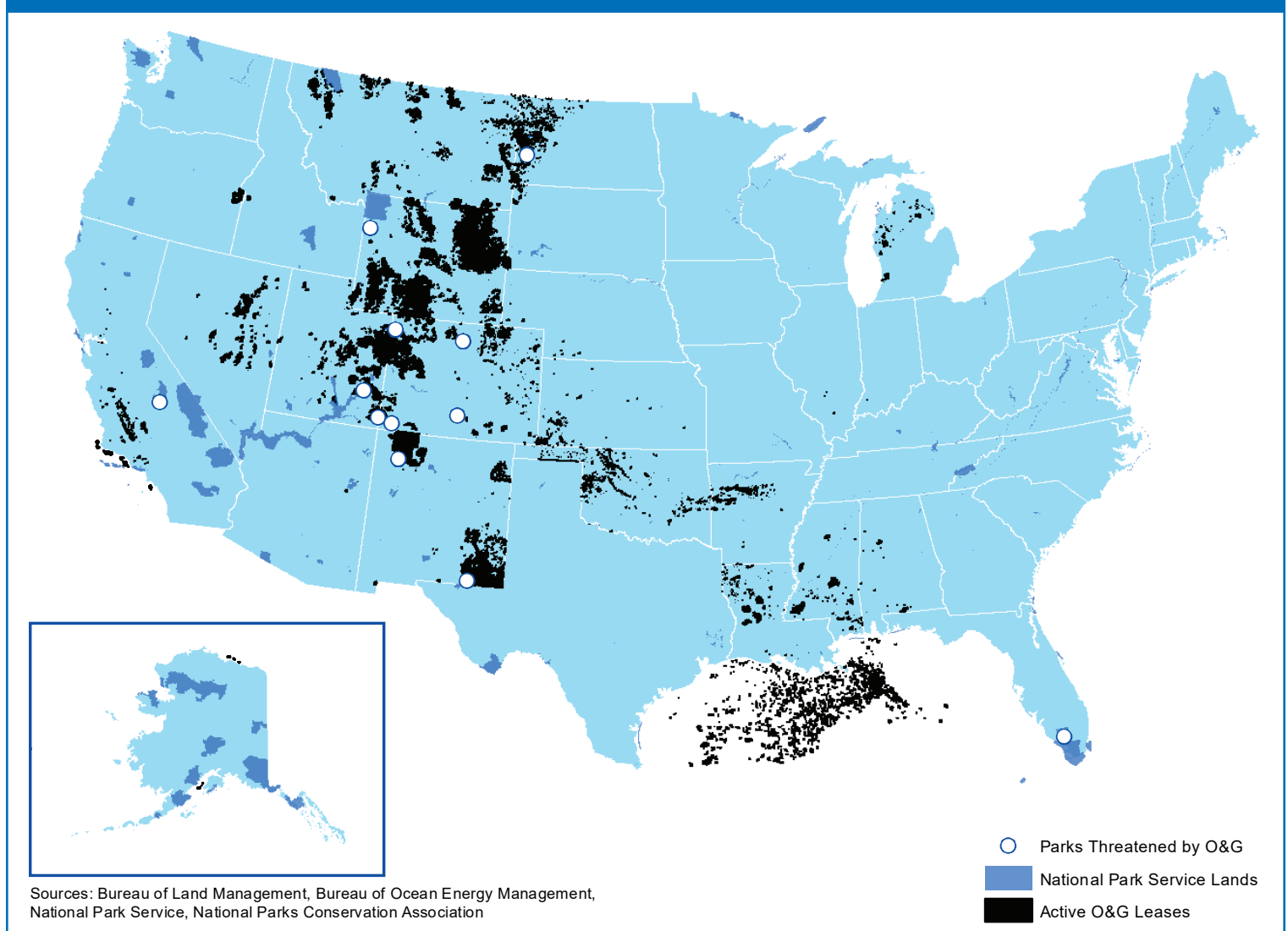
About a quarter of energy-related greenhouse gas emissions come from fossil fuel extraction on federal lands and waters.¹⁴ Flaring and venting of methane emissions at oil and gas operations has significantly increased.¹⁵ From 2009 to 2015, drillers on public lands vented or flared 462 billion cubic feet (bcf) of natural gas – enough to serve over 6 million homes annually.¹⁶ The 30 bcf of gas vented in 2014 alone is equal to greenhouse gas emissions from over 350,000 passenger vehicles.¹⁷

Moreover, the Trump administration leased 5.4 million acres of land to oil and gas companies – drilling them could result in the climate equivalent of over 1,000 coal-fired power plants burning coal for a year. Drilling the nearly 5 million acres leased in the Gulf of Mexico would be comparable to a million extra cars on the road.¹⁸

Our National Parks, Cultural Sites and Conservation Areas are at Stake

Only 10 percent of federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management are protected for wildlife, conservation or recreation – the other 90 percent is open to oil and gas leasing.¹⁹ This development threatens our nationally treasured parks, cultural sites and conservation areas. At least a dozen parks, including Chaco Culture National Historical Park and Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, Grand Tetons, Canyonlands and Theodore Roosevelt National Parks, are at risk of pollution, habitat destruction and diminished outdoor economies.²⁰ Sacred tribal lands like Bears Ears National Monument are also threatened.²¹ And Pristine wilderness like Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, home to caribou, polar bears and other wildlife, is endangered (see Figure 2).²²

Figure 2: National Parks and Sites Threatened by Federally-Managed Oil & Gas Development²³





New Mexico's Carlsbad Caverns National Park is one of several parks threatened by the oil and gas industry, putting them at risk of pollution, habitat destruction and diminished outdoor economies.

Recommendations

There is no time to waste when it comes to addressing climate change and protecting public health and our environment. We must take action to ban fossil fuels and rapidly transition to renewable energy sources. The executive branch can and must ban fracking and fossil fuel drilling on our public lands if we hope to make meaningful steps to avert climate catastrophe.

Endnotes

- 1 Tyson, Alec and Brian Kennedy. Pew Research Center. "Two-thirds of Americans think government should do more on climate." June 23, 2020; Dumain, Emma. "Polls: Voters want land protections, end to drilling." *E&E News*. October 15, 2020.
- 2 Gorski, Irena and Brian S. Schwartz. "Environmental health concerns from unconventional natural gas development." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*. February 2019 at 1 and 2; Food & Water Watch (FWW). "Fracking's Bridge to Climate Chaos." January 2020 at 3, 4 and 6.
- 3 Natter, Ari. "Here's why Biden can't ban fracking, but could restrict it." *Bloomberg*. October 21, 2020; U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI). Bureau of Land Management (BLM). [Press release]. "BLM proposes to rescind rule on hydraulic fracturing." July 25, 2017.
- 4 FWW analysis of Natural Resources Revenue Data. Production by Year. DOI. Available at <https://revenue.data.doi.gov/downloads/production/>. Accessed November 2020; U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). Natural Gas Gross Withdrawals. Available at http://www.eia.gov/dnav/ng/ng_prod_sum_a_epg0_fgw_mmcf_a.htm. Accessed November 2020; EIA. Crude Oil Production. Available at http://www.eia.gov/dnav/pet/pet_crd_crpdn_adc_mbbbl_a.htm. Accessed November 2020.
- 5 BLM. Oil and Gas Statistics. Table 2 Acreage in Effect, Table 6 Producing Acres. Available at <https://www.blm.gov/programs/energy-and-minerals/oil-and-gas/oil-and-gas-statistics>. Accessed December 2020.
- 6 DOI. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM). "Combined Leasing Report as of December 1, 2020." Available at <https://www.boem.gov/oil-gas-energy/leasing/combined-leasing-status-report>. December 2020 at 1.
- 7 Evans, Brandon. "US drilling on federal and Indian land surges in 2019." *S&P Global Platts*. October 28, 2019; Brown, Matthew and Cathy Bussewitz. "Oil companies lock in drilling, challenging Biden on climate." *Associated Press*. January 10, 2021.
- 8 Udall, Tom and Charles Grassley. [Op-ed]. "Oil and gas companies keep taking from taxpayers. And taking." *New York Times*. December 2, 2020.
- 9 Brown and Bussewitz (2021).
- 10 Natter (2020).
- 11 American Petroleum Institute. Prepared by OnLocation, Inc. "The Consequences of a Leasing and Development Ban on Federal Lands and Waters." September 2020 at 2, 4, 8 and 9. FWW is defining "fracked oil and gas" as that produced from tight oil, shale gas and tight gas. The report estimates the difference in 2030, if a drilling ban were enacted today vs. a business as usual scenario (no ban).
- 12 FWW analysis of DOI and EIA data.
- 13 FWW analysis of DOI data.
- 14 Merrill, Matthew D. et al. U.S. Geological Survey. "Federal Lands Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sequestration in the United States: Estimates for 2005-14." Scientific Investigations Report 2018-5131. 2018 at 1, 3 and 8.
- 15 Moser, Claire et al. Center for American Progress. The Wilderness Society. "Cutting Greenhouse Gas from Fossil-Fuel Extraction on Federal Lands and Waters." March 19, 2015 at 1.
- 16 81 Fed. Reg. 83008, 83009. November 18, 2016.
- 17 81 Fed. Reg. 83008, 83010-83011. November 18, 2016; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator. Available at <https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator>. Accessed November 2020.
- 18 Holden, Emily et al. "Revealed: The full extent of Trump's 'meat cleaver' assault on US wilderness." *Guardian*. October 26, 2020.
- 19 The Wilderness Society. "Open for Business (And Not Much Else): How Public Land Management Favors the Oil and Gas Industry." 2016 at 1.
- 20 National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). "Spoiled Parks: The 12 National Parks Most Threatened by Oil and Gas Development." October 2019 at 5 to 7; Holden et al. (2020).
- 21 Holden et al. (2020).
- 22 Fountain, Henry. "Sale of Arctic Refuge oil and gas leases is set for early January." *New York Times*. December 3, 2020.
- 23 FWW analysis of BLM National Oil and Gas Leases Polygons. BLM. Available at <https://landscape.blm.gov/geoportal/catalog/search/search.page>. Accessed January 11, 2021; Gulf, Pacific and Alaska Active Lease Polygons. BOEM. Available at <https://www.boem.gov/oil-gas-energy/mapping-and-data>. Accessed January 15, 2021; National Park Service (NPS) Boundary. NPS. Available at <https://public-nps.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/nps-boundary-1>. Accessed January 13, 2021; NPCA (2019) at 6.