January 20, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear President Biden and Secretary Haaland,

To protect the nation from catastrophic climate impacts, and to ensure this administration continues to meet its historic commitments to environmental and racial justice, we urge you to immediately reject the bids or suspend the offshore leases under Lease Sale 257 in the Gulf of Mexico, to stop all remaining offshore lease sales planned in the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska, and to issue a new five-year offshore lease plan that includes no new leases after the current five-year plan expires this year.

As environmental organizations and activists that represent millions of members across the United States, including communities in Gulf states that have been impacted by climate and environmental disasters as a result of offshore drilling, we are shocked by this administration’s decision to sell 80 million acres of public waters to ExxonMobil, BP, and other polluters less than a week after COP26. Burning the oil and gas that the Department of the Interior projected to be developed as a result of Lease Sale 257 would be the equivalent of building 130 new coal-powered plants. As such, building even one new oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico will deepen the climate crisis, disproportionately imperiling low-income communities and communities of color in the process.

We are also concerned that the administration has not been forthcoming with the public about its reasons for moving forward with Lease Sale 257. We have learned that the administration acknowledged in its own court filings that the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Louisiana (WDLA) had not compelled the Department of the Interior (Interior) to move forward with the sale within a specific timeframe, as recently reported by The Guardian.

As commander-in-chief, it is imperative that you defend the nation’s interests from the continued fossil fuel extraction driving the climate emergency by taking the following actions:
1. Follow Federal Law to Stop Lease Sale 257 and Remaining 2022 Offshore Lease Sales

We urge you, first and foremost, to reject the bids or suspend the leases under Lease Sale 257 and to correct the Trump administration’s flawed National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) analysis that was used to justify the sale by claiming that the sale would have no impact on climate change or the environment. We also urge you to cancel the remaining lease sales planned in the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska. This administration has repeatedly cited the WDLA ruling in June 2021 (*Louisiana et. al. v. Biden et. al.*) as the basis for why the Interior was obligated to move forward with offshore lease sales. But in that ruling, the court recognizes that “there is a huge difference between the discretion to stop or pause a lease sale because the land has become ineligible for a reason such as an environmental issue, and, stopping or pausing a lease sale with no such issues and only as a result of Executive Order 14008.” The court’s order, therefore, does not preclude the Interior from following federal law, including NEPA and the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA), which grant the Interior Secretary discretion to stop lease sales to allow for proper and comprehensive environmental review. We urge you to do so before new leases become effective.

2. Create a New Five-Year Lease Plan with No New Lease Sales

Secondly, as you are also aware, OCSLA requires the Interior Secretary to create a new five-year plan for offshore lease sales after the current plan expires this year. In accordance with OCSLA, we urge you to create a new five-year lease plan that includes *no new offshore lease sales* for the next five years. Issuing a new five-year lease plan with no new leases will have no effect on the fossil fuel industry’s ability to meet the nation’s energy needs, nor will it affect jobs. As the Interior previously acknowledged in January 2021, “the oil and gas industry has stockpiled millions of acres of leases on public lands and waters” that remain unused and non-producing. In March 2021, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki also stated that stopping these lease sales “will not affect oil and gas production or jobs for years to come.”

Creating a new five-year lease plan with no new leases will, however, give the United States critical time to combat the climate emergency by not adding new emissions to the crisis while we work to reduce existing greenhouse gases and transition to clean energy. This will also improve the administration’s position on the world stage when it comes to climate action ahead of both the World Economic Forum and COP27 this year. Finally, it will fulfill the President’s promise to end fossil fuel leasing.

We are in an unprecedented crisis and need leadership from your administration. Just this past month, temperatures in Alaska reached record-high temperatures of nearly 70 degrees, and scientists now warn that the “doomsday” Thwaites glacier in Antarctica is near collapse,
threatening to accelerate a 10-foot rise in global sea levels that could decimate coastal cities within the next five years. As recently outlined by the Department of Defense and the National Intelligence Council in October 2021, we must immediately reduce emissions to prevent the impacts of climate change on U.S. food systems, infrastructure, supply chains, and public health.

The above actions would be in accordance with existing federal law and in compliance with the ruling issued by WDLA in Louisiana et. al. that struck down the pause on offshore leasing via executive order. These actions would also be in alignment with this administration’s commitment to center environmental justice in all decision-making. For these reasons, we urge you to marshall the full authority of your office to cancel or suspend Lease Sale 257, stop the remaining leases in the current five-year offshore leasing plan, and issue a new five-year leasing plan that includes no new lease sales.

Sincerely,

Andrew Hudson  
Founder  
198 Methods

Laura Neish  
Executive Director  
350 Bay Area

Patricia Hine  
President  
350 Eugene

Sherry Pollack  
Co-Founder  
350 Hawaii

Shelden Prentice  
Federal Policy Lead  
350 Seattle

Daniel Villa  
Volunteer  
350 Tacoma

Karen Bearden  
Coordinator  
350 Triangle

Emily Southard  
US Team Co-Coordinator  
350.org

Dineen O’Rourke  
Campaign Manager  
350 PDX

Karen Bueno  
Leaders Team Member  
Accelerate Neighborhood Climate Action

Erika Thi Patterson  
Campaign Director  
Action Center on Race and the Economy

Maayan Cohen  
National Campaigns Director  
Action for the Climate Emergency

Katie Huffling  
Executive Director  
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

Sarah Stewart  
President  
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc.

Heather Cantino  
Steering Committee Chair  
Athens County’s Future Action Network

Ellen E. Barfield  
Co-Founder and Coordinator  
Phil Berrigan Memorial Chapter, Veterans for Peace
Patricia Alessandrini
Secretary
Bergen County Green Party

Ted Glick
Organizer
Beyond Extreme Energy

Mark Hefflinger
Communications & Digital Director
Bold Alliance

Marie Venner
Co-Chair
Businesses for a Livable Climate

Marie Venner and Stefanie Klass
Co-Chairs
Call to Action Colorado

Mark Meeks
Minister
Capitol Heights Presbyterian

Stefanie Klass
Co-Chair
CatholicNetwork US

Nikki Reisch
Director, Climate & Energy Program
Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)

Marie Venner and Jim Smith
Co-Chairs
CO Businesses for a Livable Climate

Fred Kirsch
Director
Community for Sustainable Energy

Irene Danysh
Coordinator
Community Visions

Donald Alfred Hebbard
President & Founding Member
Compressor Free Franklin

Rose Ann Witt
Co-Founder
Conejo Climate Coalition

Clayton Dewey
Ecosocialist Committee Chair
Denver Democratic Socialists of America

Mary Gutierrez
Director
Earth Action, Inc.

Elizabeth Dunne
Director of Legal Advocacy
Earth Law Center

Alexandria Villaseñor
Founder & Executive Director
Earth Uprising International

Leah Redwood
Activist
Extinction Rebellion San Francisco Bay Area

Thomas Meyer
National Organizing Manager
Food & Water Watch

Julia Walsh
Director
Frack Action

Patricia J. Popple
Editor
Frac Sand Sentinel: Project Outreach

Shannon Smith
Executive Director
FracTracker Alliance

Katharina Maier
Organizer
Fridays for Future U.S.

Hallie Templeton
Legal Director
Friends of the Earth

Codi Norred
Executive Director
Georgia Interfaith Power and Light

Sara Shor
Organizing Director
GreenFaith

Julia Jackson
Founder
Grounded

Colette Pichon Battle
Executive Director
Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy
Manna Jo Green
Environmental Director
Hudson River Sloop Clearwater

Rachel Lehman
Chair of Healthy Communities
I-70 Citizens Advisory Group

August Allen
Executive Director
In the Shadow of the Wolf

Dallas Goldtooth
Campaigner
Indigenous Environmental Network

Philip Beck
Co-Founder
Indivisible Ambassadors

Elizabeta Stacishin
Climate Envoy
Indivisible Colorado

Basav Sen
Climate Policy Director
Institute for Policy Studies Climate Policy Program

Mark J. Palmer
Associate Director
Intl. Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute

Amy Petre Hill
Founder & Community Chaplain
Mental Health and Inclusion Ministries

Emmett Hobley
Co-Chair
Montbello Neighborhood Improvement Association

Naeema Muhammad
Organizing Co-Director
NC Environmental Justice Network

Anni Hanna
Director
New Mexico Climate Justice

Jerry Rivers
Environmental Scientist
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment

Kristi Douglas
Commerce City Councilor & Co-Chair
North Range Concerned Citizens

Sally Jane Gellert
Member
Occupy Bergen County

Courtney Vail
Campaign Director
Oceanic Preservation Society

Emily Martin
National Policy & Programs Manager
Our Climate

Paco Fabian
Communications & Campaigns Director
Our Revolution

Michael Helms
Senior Advisor, Government Affairs
Oxfam America

Ayisha Siddiqa
Co-Founder
Polluters Out

Cheryl Barnds and Marie Venner
Co-Chair & Founder
RapidShift Network

Dorothy Slater
Senior Climate Researcher
Revolving Door Project

Jeff Hart
Co-Founder
Save EPA

Marie Venner
Chair
Small Business Alliance

Jennifer Nielsen
Climate Co-Chair
SOMA Action

Matt Krogh
U.S. Oil & Gas Campaign Director
Stand.earth

Susan Van Dolsen
Co-Founder
Stop the Algonquin Pipeline Expansion

Lauren Naunus
Advocacy Director
Sunrise Movement
Maura Stephens  
Coordinating Committee Member  
System Change Not Climate Change

Timothy Edward Duda  
Founder  
Terra Advocati

Zack Burley  
Policy Associate  
The Climate Mobilization

Harmony Commings  
Co-Founder  
The Green House Connection Center

Fran Aguirre and Deb James  
Co-President  
Unite North Metro Denver

Paddy McClelland  
Co-Founder  
Wall of Women

Rachel Dawn Davis  
Public Policy & Justice Organizer  
Waterspirit

Chris Calwell  
Co-Chair  
Western Slope Businesses for a Livable Climate

Osprey Orielle Lake  
Executive Director  
Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network

Renee M. Canon  
Executive Director & Co-Founder  
Womxn from the Mountain