

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 marshal 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,

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