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Protesters Tell Feds to 'Keep It in the Ground' at Colorado Oil and Gas Auction

Keep It in the Ground Movement Brings Climate Justice to Western Public Lands Leasing

DENVER— Dozens of protesters with giant puppets, polar bears, oil derricks, signs and banners staged a climate rally today outside of the Bureau of Land Management's oil and gas lease sale in Lakewood, Colo., urging President Obama to "keep it in the ground."

The BLM's "climate auction," as protesters dubbed it, allowed industry to bid on more than 90,000 acres of publicly owned oil and gas in central and eastern Colorado — which contain upwards of 1 million estimated tons of potential greenhouse gas pollution, and possibly much more.

The rally is part of a rapidly growing national movement calling on President Obama to define his climate legacy by stopping new federal fossil fuel leases on public lands and oceans — a step that would keep up to 450 billion tons of carbon pollution from escaping into the atmosphere. Similar "Keep It in the Ground" rallies are planned for upcoming lease sales in Reno, Nev., Salt Lake City and Washington, D.C.

The auction was held despite earlier administrative protests ([here](#) and [here](#)) and a [letter](#) to President Obama urging the lease sale be cancelled because of runaway greenhouse gas pollution and climate impacts. Climate activists argued that the auction perpetuates a conflict between the administration's climate goals and its "all of the above" energy policy by leasing federal fossil fuels that should be considered "unburnable" in the context of global carbon budgets. Federal fossil fuels — those that the president controls — should be the first taken off the table to mitigate climate damage.

More than 400 organizations and leaders working on the "Keep It in the Ground" campaign [called on](#) President Obama to end new federal fossil fuel leases following reports that doing so would keep up to 450 billion tons of greenhouse gas pollution in the ground, and that the president has the legal authority to do so now, without Congress. Those emissions would be incompatible with any reasonable U.S. share of global carbon budgets to avoid catastrophic warming.

Last week Senator Merkley (D-Ore.) and others introduced legislation to end new and cancel non-producing federal fossil fuel leases. Days later President Obama cancelled the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, saying "Because ultimately, if we're going to prevent large parts of this Earth from becoming not only inhospitable but uninhabitable in our lifetimes, we're going to have to keep some fossil fuels in the ground rather than burn them and release more dangerous pollution into the sky."

Groups participating in today's rally included 350 Colorado, 350.org, Audubon Society of Greater Denver, Be the Change, Center for Biological Diversity, Coloradans Against Fracking, Direct FRACKtion, Earth Guardians, Food & Water Watch, Frack-Free CO, Friends of the Earth, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Greenpeace, Rainforest Action Network, Rights for All People, Ruckus Society, Save the Colorado, Sierra Club Rocky Mountain Chapter, Wall of Women Colorado, WildEarth Guardians and others.

Images from today's protest are available for media use [here](#).

Statements from Individuals and Groups

"We're out of time for delays, half-measures and 'all of the above' energy policies," said Micah Parkin of 350 Colorado. "If we are to avoid the



Photo by Taylor McKinnon, Center for Biological Diversity. Photos are [available](#) for media use.

most severe global climate impacts by keeping global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius, President Obama and our other national leaders will have to make more brave decisions like rejecting the KXL pipeline. We must keep fossil fuels in the ground — starting with public lands — and transition rapidly to a clean, renewable energy future.”

“The Audubon Society of Greater Denver’s familiarity with the Pawnee National Grassland leads us to believe that more oil and gas leasing there will fragment and damage wildlife habitat, disturb wildlife, eliminate scenic viewsheds and diminish recreational opportunity,” said Pauline P. Reetz of Audubon Society of Greater Denver. “The shortgrass prairie deserves our protection; these leases should be withdrawn.”

“A couple of years back, our research showed only about 30 percent of the federal leases in Colorado are in production mode,” said Phillip Doe with Be the Change. “There is no need to give more of the country to the oil industry. Is it too much to expect the government save a little public land for the public?”

“Today’s auction shows the dangerous disconnect between President Obama’s climate rhetoric and his fossil fuel leasing program,” said Taylor McKinnon of the Center for Biological Diversity. “Last week he rejected the Keystone XL pipeline and called for more fossil fuels to stay in the ground. This week he can actually do that by stopping new fossil fuel leases on our public lands.”

"Right now there is enough fossil fuels in the known reserves of industry to make the earth uninhabitable," said Gary Roland of Direct FRACKtion. "These lease sales are corporate giveaways that not only increase the gap between the 1% and the rest of us by privatizing our public lands at clearance sale rates, but also perpetuate the perception that we need more fossil fuels, when in fact we already have more than enough. In order for us to survive climate chaos as a species we must 'keep it in the ground.'"

“President Obama did the right thing by blocking the Keystone Pipeline, but he cannot claim the mantle of climate leadership while his administration continues to promote increased oil and gas production and allows our treasured public lands to be fracked by the industry,” said Emily Wurth, water program director at Food & Water Watch. “It’s time for President Obama to stop the giveaways to the oil and gas industry, put a halt to fossil fuel leases on federal lands, and work to keep fossil fuels in the ground.”

“President Obama cannot claim climate leadership while continuing to lease fossil fuels,” said Marissa Knodel, climate campaigner with Friends of the Earth. “With more fossil fuels leased than can be burned to avoid climate catastrophe, President Obama must put a stop to all new lease sales of public fossil fuels.”

“We want President Obama to make public lands part of the solution to climate change, not part of the problem,” said Shelley Silbert, executive director of Great Old Broads for Wilderness, based in Colorado. “Grasslands, forests, and other public lands play an important role in absorbing carbon, but instead the fossil fuels extracted and burned from public lands each year emit almost five times more carbon than these lands can absorb. That equation won’t work for our kids and grandkids.”

“Enough is enough. Corporate giveaways of our public lands need to end,” said Ruth Breech with Rainforest Action Network. “Energy giants Shell, Anadarko and Yates Petroleum are exploiting our most precious resources. Our climate, our health and our future is not for sale.”

"Selling of our public lands to the highest bidder should not be allowed," said Zabrina Arnovitz with Rights For All People. "The health of our communities and our public lands should not be auctioned off to the highest bidder. It's time for President Obama to take a real stance on climate change and our communities and shut down all sales of public lands for fossil fuel extraction."

"Climate change is one of the biggest threats to the health of the Colorado River which is almost completely surrounded by thousands of square miles of public land on which there is massive and increasing amounts of fossil fuel extraction," said Gary Wockner with Save the Colorado. "We must 'Keep It In The Ground' to protect our planet, nation, states and water supplies for humans as well as all of the non-human critters that depend on the Colorado River for survival."

"Will the BLM listen to all the citizen voices who pleaded with it to protect our public lands, or will it sell itself out to the despoilers of those lands?" asked Harv Teitelbaum with Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Sierra Club.

"It's time for President Obama to stop sacrificing cherished landscapes and our climate to the fracking industry," said Jeremy Nichols, Climate and Energy Program Director for WildEarth Guardians. "Our future generations are depending on us to safeguard our public lands and keep fossil fuels in the ground today."

Background

The American public owns nearly 650 million acres of federal public land, and more than 1.7 billion acres of Outer Continental Shelf — and the fossil fuels beneath them. This includes federal public lands like national parks, national forests and wildlife refuges that make up about a third of the U.S. land area — and oceans like Alaska’s Chukchi Sea, the Gulf of Mexico and the eastern seaboard. These places and fossil fuels are held in trust for the public by the federal government; federal fossil fuel leasing is administered by the Department of the Interior.

Over the past decade, the combustion of federal fossil fuels has resulted in nearly a quarter of all U.S. energy-related emissions. An August report by EcoShift consulting, commissioned by the Center for Biological Diversity and Friends of the Earth, found that remaining federal oil, gas, coal, oil shale and tar sands that has not been leased to industry contains up to 450 billion tons of potential greenhouse gas pollution. As of earlier this year, 67 million acres federal fossil fuel were already leased to industry, an area more than 55 times larger than Grand Canyon National Park containing up to 43 billion tons of potential greenhouse gas pollution.

Download the September “Keep It in the Ground” letter to Obama [here](#).

Download *Grounded: The President’s Power to Fight Climate Change, Protect Public Lands by Keeping Publicly Owned Fossil Fuels in the Ground* [here](#) (this report details the legal authorities with which a president can halt new federal fossil fuel leases).

Download *The Potential Greenhouse Gas Emissions of U.S. Federal Fossil Fuels* [here](#) (this report quantifies the volume and potential greenhouse gas emissions of remaining federal fossil fuels).

Download *The Potential Greenhouse Gas Emissions* fact sheet [here](#).

Download an analysis of volumes and potential emissions of the Colorado, Utah and Wyoming oil and gas lease sales (including today’s sale) [here](#).

Download *Public Lands, Private Profits* [here](#) (this report details the corporations profiting from climate-destroying fossil fuel extraction on public lands).

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