

September 21, 2020

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters across the country, we the undersigned groups urge you to support the *Public Engagement Opportunity on Public Land Exploration (PEOPLE) Act of 2020*, which seeks to ensure greater transparency and public participation in federal oil and gas leasing and development approvals. This bill will address the inadequacies of the current federal oil and gas leasing system for many of those affected by these decisions, including the lack of certainty for public comment periods, local government engagement, and Federal agency and Tribal government consultation.

This Administration has stifled and suppressed the public's opportunity to weigh in on oil and gas leasing decisions, shortening comment periods and foregoing adequate public notice before leasing occurs. In January 2018, the Bureau of Land Management issued Instruction Memorandum (IM) [2018-034](#) to overturn prior guidance that required consideration of meaningful public input in oil and gas leasing decisions on public lands and minerals. Although some of that guidance has been thrown out by a court, the need for guaranteed public oversight of oil and gas management decisions throughout the West remains. In July 2018, for instance, Colorado BLM added 5,000 acres of leases in the White River National Forest roadless lands to a list of parcels to be included in the September 2018 lease sale. Without a requirement to provide for public comment, BLM simply took the opportunity to add the parcels to a proposed sale list without any other notice or opportunity for review beyond filing a formal protest.

Our National Forests were further put at risk when the U.S Forest Service issued its [Oil and Gas Resources Proposed Rule](#) that would cut the public out of the process that decides whether and how lands will be made available for oil and gas drilling, threatening more than 9 million acres across the West. The proposed rules would be a dramatic departure from the Forest Service's previous commitments to transparency and environmental review, and result in the Forest Service essentially giving away its right to serve as a check on leasing by the BLM for those places that need protections.

The PEOPLE Act will help improve transparency and restore opportunities for the public to have a say in how their public lands should be managed. The fact that this administration believes that these opportunities can so easily be stripped away just reinforces the importance of codifying them into law. This bill mandates pragmatic leasing procedures that encourage public participation and proactive outreach with state agencies, private landowners, local governments, Tribal communities and other stakeholders. The bill would greatly improve the current system in which BLM passively offers parcels of industry's choosing and is then forced to respond to protests and lawsuits from negatively impacted members of the public.

Everyone who cares about public lands deserves to have their voices heard before approval of oil and gas development that could impact their health, homes, livelihoods, economic wellbeing, communities and the places they value. We strongly encourage you to support the *Public Engagement Opportunity on*

*Public Land Exploration Act*, to improve the public engagement opportunities and transparency in local land management decisions.

Sincerely,

Coalition to Protect America's National Parks  
Colorado Wildlife Federation  
Conservation Colorado  
Clean Water Action  
Earthjustice  
Earthworks  
Friends of the Earth  
Green Latinos  
Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO)  
League of Conservation Voters  
Montana Wildlife Federation  
National Audubon Society  
National Parks Conservation Association  
National Wildlife Federation  
Nevada Wildlife Federation  
New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light  
New Mexico Wildlife Federation  
Northern Plains Resource Council  
ProgressNow New Mexico  
Rocky Mountain Wild  
San Juan Citizens Alliance  
Sierra Club  
The Wilderness Society  
Vet Voice Foundation  
Western Colorado Alliance for Community Action  
Western Leaders Network  
Western Organization of Resource Councils  
Western Values Project  
Wilderness Workshop