



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on October 9, 2019

BLM to Allow 37 New Oil & Gas Wells in California; Environmentalists Outraged

[A decision](#) by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to allow “up to” 37 natural gas or oil wells to be leased on government property in California has raised the ire of environmentalists, left-wing papers, and liberal green “public interest” law firms.

The press release from the BLM last Thursday sounded scary, and the green movement took maximum advantage of it. BLM said the approval “makes approximately 680,000 acres of Federal mineral estate available for leasing ... and another 42,000 acres available” for a total of 722,000 acres now open for bidding by energy developers.



Immediately, the *San Francisco Chronicle* headlined the coming disaster with a photo of oil derricks dotting the landscape near Bakersfield and a warning that the “Trump administration opens California to new oil drilling; possibly Bay Area, too.” The *Sacramento Bee’s* headline shouted: “Trump opening California public land to fracking, gas leases. It is ‘reckless’?”

Yes, it is, intoned the *Bee*, quoting Clare Lakewood, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, the public interest law firm that successfully stalled the BLM for five years, beginning long before the Trump administration replaced Obama’s in 2017. Said Lakewood, “Turning over these spectacular wild places to dirty drilling and fracking will sicken Californians, harm endangered species and fuel climate change chaos.”

Unhappy that a U.S. District Court finally, after five years of delay, ruled that BLM had met all the necessary environmental requirements, Lakewood promised more legal delays: “We’ll fight tooth and nail to make sure it doesn’t happen.”

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One had to read the BLM announcement to learn that the BLM is taking exceptional care of the environment: “An additional 67,500 acres of Federal minerals are closed to leasing and development, including designated wilderness areas, wilderness study areas and national monuments. The BLM plan also supports recovery of threatened and endangered plants and animals in the Ciervo Panoche National Area by protecting core populations from surface disturbance.”

It added that the Bureau’s decision “does not authorize any actual drilling for exploration or development of oil and gas resources.” What the decision allows is the bidding for leases by energy developers with nerve enough to enter the toxic political culture of California and endure the public chastisement from the uneducated or brainwashed who believe that they will destroy what’s left of



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California's unblemished wilderness areas, all with the hope that perhaps, over the next 20 years, their investment of time, energy, money and legal fees will turn a profit.

As far as devastating 700,000 acres of pristine untouched wilderness, the BLM noted that it "anticipates most new oil and gas development within the planning area to occur in or near existing oil fields in Fresno County."

And just how many wells already operate there? One has to wade through pages of exclamatory and derogatory commentary in the *Chronicle's* warning to learn the truth: "The drilling on federal land ... is just a fraction of the total development [already in place] ... when state and private lands in the area are counted, the region hosts 18,200 wells."

And just how long is it likely to take energy developers to lease, develop, and bring to successful completion those 37 wells? Said the BLM in its Executive Summary: "The BLM predicts a range from zero to 37 new oil and gas wells could be developed on Federal mineral estate during the next 20 years."

Nevertheless, the sky is falling, and Lakewood's gaggle of legal activists is ready to meet the challenge. After all, it's Trump's fault: "This reckless move is the toxic convergence of Trump's climate denial, loyalty to the oil industry and grudge against California."

It's hard to imagine any sort of Oklahoma land rush of energy developers invading the west coast of California given the resistance they're going to meet from locals, liberals, the media and the state government. Thanks to those roadblocks, California's energy production from those 18,000 wells has steadily declined over the last three decades. What's the incentive for energy entrepreneurs to invest millions in such a politically hostile environment?

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