

Federal Judge Vacates Oil and Gas Leases on 145,000 Acres in Montana

A federal judge in Montana has vacated oil and gas leases on 145,000 acres of land issued by the Trump administration. Judge Brian Morris found that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) failed to consider the environmental implications of the 287 leases they sold to energy companies in December 2017 and March 2018.

BLM provided no catalogue here and little analysis to show the combined environmental impacts...if BLM ever hopes to determine the true impact of its projects on climate change, it can do so only by looking at projects in combination with each other, not simply in the context of state and nation-wide emissions."

Judge Brian Morris

The Bureau of Land Management lease process requires the organization to conduct an environmental review before placing lands up for sale. In the case of these leases, Judge Morris found the environmental review process lacking, as it failed to consider the effects of drilling on local water supplies and climate change.

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With all due respect, we disagree with the Court's conclusion, and the B.L.M. stands by its analysis in following the letter of the law to issue oil and gas leases in Montana. Regardless of the ultimate outcome of this dispute and despite the attempts of radical, special interest groups, the Department and the B.L.M. will continue to work

toward ensuring America's energy independence while preserving a healthy environment."

Derrick Henry, Bureau of Land Management

The Trump administration is currently under fire for its systematic dismantling of many of the environmental protections put in place by the previous administration. Montana, in particular, has been a hotspot for legal cases between environmental groups and big oil and gas. This decision comes after a key government permit for the Keystone XL pipeline was revoked in April of this year.

The Trump administration's lust for energy dominance at the expense of people and the environment has, fortunately, hit another brick wall. This is another major win for our climate, while protecting almost 150,000 acres of public lands from industry exploitation."

Kyle Tisdell, attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center

Judge Morris has a record of environmentally friendly decisions. In addition to being the judge who recently revoked the Keystone XL permit, he also halted construction of the pipeline in 2018. In each case, he has ruled that further environmental study is necessary.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WcZ8oAYKYw>

Sources:

- *U.S. judge halts oil leases due to lack of federal study of water impacts – Reuters*
- *In A Setback For Trump, Judge Blocks Keystone XL Pipeline Construction – NPR*