

Court: Massive Offshore Oil Lease Sale in Gulf Based on Faulty Legal Analysis

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

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The D.C. District Court today [invalidated](#) the Department of the Interior’s decision to offer 80 million acres in the Gulf of Mexico for oil and gas leasing, marking a pivotal victory in the fight to defend Gulf communities and the planet from the worsening climate crisis.

The court [held](#) that Interior failed to accurately disclose and consider the greenhouse gas emissions that would result from the lease sale, violating a bedrock environmental law.

Earthjustice [filed a lawsuit](#) on behalf of Healthy Gulf, Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth on Aug. 31 against Interior Secretary Debra Haaland and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management following the notice of lease sale 257. The lawsuit noted that the 2017 environmental analysis that the Biden administration relied on to hold the sale is fatally flawed. The sale also contradicted the administration’s pledge to reduce carbon emissions by 50% to 52% by 2030.

The court decision holds Interior accountable for grossly underestimating the climate impacts and risks to Gulf communities before deciding to hold the largest oil and gas lease sale in U.S. history. This ruling ensures that waters and coasts will be protected from additional harmful drilling and eventual spills in the Gulf, where the fossil fuel industry is already sitting on 8 million acres of leases on public waters.

By vacating Interior’s decision to hold this illegal lease sale, the court has ensured that no harm will result from it. Whatever Interior decides to do, it must start with a blank slate and consider the full environmental costs.

“We are pleased that the court invalidated Interior’s illegal lease sale,” said Earthjustice’s senior attorney, Brettny Hardy. “We simply cannot continue to make

investments in the fossil fuel industry to the peril of our communities and increasingly warming planet. This administration must meet this critical moment and honor the campaign promises President Biden made by stopping offshore leasing once and for all. Interior should use its next 5-year leasing plan to protect our coastal communities and public waters and offer no new offshore leases. We can no longer afford to do anything less.”

“This is a victory for all Gulf communities impacted by the onshore pollution from offshore drilling in the Gulf,” said Cynthia Sarthou, executive director of Healthy Gulf. “Today, we can look forward to the day when we stop selling off our public waters for pennies on the dollar when a just transition to a clean energy future is critical to our very survival. Now, the Gulf can be seen as a viable field for offshore wind energy that will power our future.”

“This is a huge victory for our climate, Rice’s whales and Gulf communities,” said Kristen Monsell, oceans legal director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “I’m thrilled the court saw through the Biden administration’s horribly reckless decision to hold the largest oil lease sale in U.S. history without carefully studying the risks. New oil leases are fundamentally incompatible with addressing the climate emergency, and they’ll cause more oil spills and harm to wildlife and people in the Gulf. For the sake of our climate and frontline communities, the Biden administration must end new leasing and phase out existing drilling. Anything less would be a gross failure of climate leadership.”

“Today’s decision is a victorious outcome not only for the Gulf’s communities, wildlife, and ecosystem, but also for the warming planet,” said Hallie Templeton, legal director at Friends of the Earth. “But the fight is not over. We will continue to hold the Biden administration accountable for making unlawful decisions that contradict its pledge to take swift, urgent action on ‘code red’ climate and environmental justice priorities.”

“The Biden administration’s failure to adequately evaluate the climate impacts of this massive lease sale wasn’t just out of step with their stated commitment to climate action, it was also illegal,” said Sierra Club Senior Attorney Deborah Ancel. “We are glad that the court has held them accountable for this reckless action, and we will continue to fight to protect Gulf Coast communities from the dangers of offshore drilling and climate chaos.”

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