

During Government Shutdown, Trump Urged to Halt Fracking Permits, 2 Million-acre Lease Sale

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

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Conservation groups today called on the Trump administration to halt oil and gas drilling permits and cancel lease sales being developed during the government shutdown, saying they violate federal law. Auctions scheduled in February and March span six states and 2.3 million acres of public lands — the largest quarterly lease sales in at least a decade.

“It’s absolutely outrageous, not to mention illegal, that Trump is rolling out the red carpet for the oil and gas industry while the American people can’t even reach an agency staffer by phone,” said Rebecca Fischer, climate and energy program attorney with WildEarth Guardians. “We’ve been completely shut out of decisions affecting our public lands, and we won’t stand for it.”

Issuing drilling permits during the shutdown violates the National Environmental Policy Act and Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the groups said in a [letter](#) to acting Interior Secretary David Bernhardt. The public can’t view or provide feedback on new permits or environmental reviews since the Bureau of Land Management’s offices are closed and agency scientists furloughed.

The furloughs have also halted any work on whether environmental analysis should be required before issuing drilling permits or leasing public land for fracking. The BLM has posted public notice of at least 127 new drilling-permit applications in several states during the shutdown.

“The Trump administration is trying to use the government shutdown to do an end run around the laws that protect our air, water, and wildlife,” said Kelly Fuller, energy and mining campaign director at Western Watersheds Project. “But the Department of the Interior can’t hide forever. Sooner or later they are going to have to start talking to the public, and the longer they wait to do it, the more lawbreaking they’ll have to explain.”

Issuing drilling permits during the shutdown also violates the Antideficiency Act, which prohibits work without pay in the absence of congressional appropriations except to protect life or property. The BLM cannot require its employees to work without pay to approve drilling permits for the oil and gas industry, the groups said.

“The only thing trashier than our national parks during this shutdown has been the Trump administration’s coddling of the oil industry,” said Taylor McKinnon

of the Center for Biological Diversity. "Furloughed federal workers can't pay their mortgages, but Trump is hellbent on ensuring profits for fossil-fuel corporations. Not one new lease or drilling permit should be allowed under these conditions."

The groups are calling on the BLM to halt February and March oil and gas lease sales in Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado and Montana. Furloughed biological- and cultural-resource specialists cannot evaluate public comments on those sales, conduct environmental reviews or consult with tribes as required by law.

Citing similar reasons, a second coalition of conservation groups today also [called](#) on Bernhardt to cancel those sales.

According to an analysis by the Center for Biological Diversity, if all the parcels offered in the February and March sales were developed, it would create up to 407 million tons of greenhouse gas pollution. That's the equivalent of the annual climate pollution from 104 coal-fired power plants.

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