

Lawsuit Filed after Biden Opens 79 Million Acres of Gulf of Mexico for Oil

Feds Announce Lease Sale as Louisiana Reels From Impacts of Hurricane Ida

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

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Immediately following the Biden administration’s decision to offer 79 million acres of the Gulf of Mexico for oil and gas leasing, environmental and Gulf groups today [filed a challenge](#) to the lease sale in court.

Earthjustice filed the lawsuit in federal court in the District of Columbia on behalf of Healthy Gulf, Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and the Center for Biological Diversity. It was filed against Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management following the notice of lease sale 257.

“In the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, it is clear that we need to be doing everything we can to transition away from fossil fuels to reduce the impacts of climate change such as stronger, more frequent hurricanes,” said **Cynthia Sarthou**, executive director of Healthy Gulf. “Continuing to sell leases that allow business as usual is a bad decision.”

“This lease sale is deeply disappointing. The Biden administration has folded to the oil industry based on its campaign of disinformation and political pressure, ignoring the worsening climate emergency we face,” said **Brett Hardy**, an attorney with Earthjustice. “Our planet cannot handle more stress from oil and gas production and yet the Biden administration is plowing ahead with a lease sale that will have impacts for decades into the future.”

“We’ll invite more disasters by selling off more of the Gulf to the oil industry,” said **Kristen Monsell**, oceans legal director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “As Louisiana recovers from this unprecedented extreme hurricane, it’s obscene to allow business as usual in offshore leasing. Climate change is rapidly intensifying Gulf storms, fueling uncontrollable wildfires in the West and threatening numerous species with extinction. We need to end offshore oil drilling, not burden future generations with this dirty and dangerous folly.”

“Despite campaign promises to be climate and environmental justice champions, the Biden administration has opted to resume oil and gas lease sales,” said **Hallie Templeton**, deputy legal director at Friends of the Earth. “To add insult to injury, federal officials have violated federal law by relying on outdated and flawed environmental analysis while continuing to treat the Gulf of Mexico as a sacrificial zone to Big Oil. To say we are disappointed is a gross understatement.”

“Frontline communities of the Gulf have been sacrificed to fossil fuel interests for far too long. As Hurricane Ida ravages the Gulf Coast, it’s never been more obvious that these communities deserve better than business as usual and yet another sale of millions of acres of Gulf waters for oil and gas extraction,” said **Devorah Ancel**, a senior attorney with Sierra Club. “At the very least, the administration has an obligation to evaluate new information on climate change before taking such reckless action. Failing to do so is completely out of step with President Biden’s stated commitment to meaningfully address the climate crisis.”

The environmental analysis of the proposed sale relies on improper modeling to conclude that *not* having the lease sale will result in *more* greenhouse gases. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals rejected this approach last year. Just a few weeks ago, a federal district court in Alaska found that the same conclusion was deeply flawed after the Department of the Interior tried to rely on it again for a large oil development project in Alaska’s Western Arctic.

The analysis is not only flawed but also out of date. The Interior Department last looked at the environmental impacts of a lease sale in 2017. Since Interior completed its environmental analysis, significant new information has emerged that demonstrates, among other things, the dire state of the climate crisis and the potential for increased harm to endangered species, including the Rice’s whale, one of the most endangered whales on the planet, that is only found in the Gulf of Mexico.

Background

The plaintiff groups had previously sent a letter to Sec. Haaland on legal alternatives to this lease sale. That letter can be found [here](#): [Letter to Sec. Haaland, et al. from plaintiff groups on legal alternatives to offering Lease Sale 257](#).

Last month the United Nations [affirmed](#) that the climate crisis is “unequivocally” the result of human influence and that this influence now has a strong hand in climate and weather extremes. The Gulf region has been feeling these extremes as just two days ago the region saw one of the strongest and most rapidly intensifying hurricanes ever to make landfall.

Interior’s own estimates show that the sale will lead to the production of up to 1.12 billion barrels of oil and 4.2 trillion cubic feet of gas over the next 50 years, which will contribute substantial greenhouse gas emissions. [Gulf leasing complaint](#).

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