



SIERRA CLUB

TEHIPITE CHAPTER

Letter to Trump's BLM: No Drilling on CA Public Lands

Introduction

by Gary Lasky, Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Under the Trump administration, BLM's goal is to sell off our precious public lands to the oil, mining, and timber industries for profit. The result? Extraction of our limited public resources at a time when U.S. oil production is the highest in the world, air pollution creates a health crisis for our Valley residents, and the release of large quantities of methane (natural gas) from oil wells, refineries, the supply chain, including our kitchens. [Ed.]

BLM California manages nearly 600 producing oil and gas leases covering more than 200,000 acres and 7,900 usable wells. Between 80% and 90% of all surface-disturbing activities related to oil and gas activities occur in the San Joaquin Valley on public lands administered by Central California District, Bakersfield Field Office. More than 95% of all Federal drilling occurs in established fields within the Kern County area of the San Joaquin Valley.

From the BLM

The BLM oil and gas program in California is one of the more active in all of the western states, with 2013 onshore oil production figures ranking the State as the 3rd most productive state in the United States. In 2012, California was ranked as the 13th most productive natural gas producing state. BLM California is responsible for managing one of the most productive individual onshore leases in the lower 48 states, and four of the nation's top seven producing oil fields are located in Kern County. As a general rule, California's Federal production totals average approximately 8% -10% of California's total oil and natural gas production.

RECENT SIGN-ON LETTER

Drafted by the Center for Biological Diversity and presented to BLM

July 23, 2025

Bureau of Land Management
Bakersfield Field Office

**Re: Intent To Prepare Oil and Gas Supplemental
Environmental Impact Statement and Potential Resource
Management Plan Amendment: Bakersfield**

As environmental, public health and community groups with hundreds of thousands of members in California, we are alarmed that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing to open more than a million acres of public lands and mineral estate in California to oil and gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing (fracking). We are opposed to this action—it risks dire impacts to communities, the climate, wildlife, and more. Should BLM allow any new fossil fuel development, however, it must adhere to California laws and policies which, among other things, prohibit fracking and require a 3,200-foot setback from new wells.

New oil and gas operations are incompatible with the urgent actions necessary to address the climate crisis. Scientists are warning that the planet's fossil fuel "budget" has been overspent. There is enough oil, gas, and coal in already open, producing fields globally to take us far beyond livable climate targets. Moreover, the evidence is clear that fossil fuels (at all lifecycle stages) are driving a multitude of interlinked crises that jeopardize the breadth and stability of life on Earth. At a time when California has faced—and is facing—devastating climate change-fueled fires, and when Texas has lost over 100 lives in a rare (yet increasingly common) 100-year flood, it defies reason and basic common sense for the federal government to continue allowing fossil fuel development, let alone inviting much more of it. Now more than ever, we must keep fossil fuels in the ground.

BLM must also consider that new drilling and fracking would further damage air quality in California, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley, which spans both the Bakersfield and Central Coast Field Office planning areas. The San Joaquin Valley is home to one of the most polluted air basins in the United States, failing to meet federal pollution standards for both particulate matter and ozone. These pollutants, which are emitted by oil and gas drilling and fracking operations, stunt children's lung development, contribute to the formation of chronic lung and heart diseases, trigger asthma and heart attacks, and are correlated with premature death. New drilling in the region would threaten the health of low-income communities and communities of color already harmed daily by toxic air pollution.

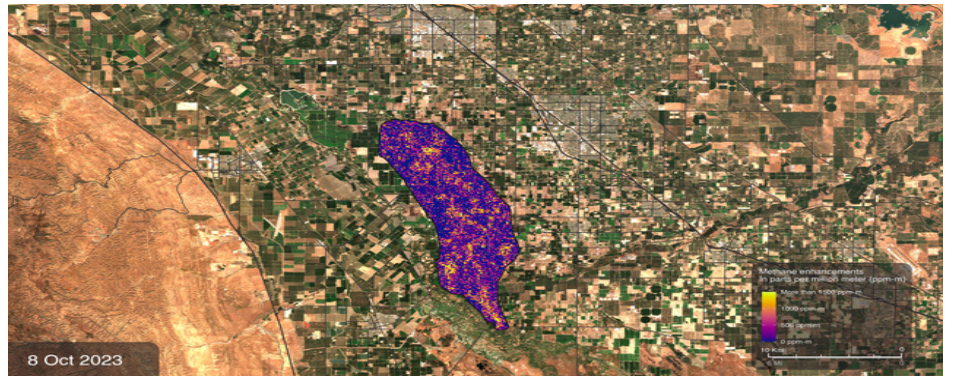


Photo credit: NASA. Satellite imagery of methane releases near Modesto, CA (public domain)

A large and growing body of published scientific research has documented that fracking and other oil and gas development activities have wide-ranging, adverse impacts on species and ecosystems. The Bakersfield Field Office's 2012 Environmental Impact Statement reported 120 different known or probable vegetation series, as well as over 40 federally listed animal species, within the planning area. Previous BLM NEPA reviews stated that over 300 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians occur or have the potential to occur within the Central Coast Field Office planning area, including 80+ species of rare, threatened, and endangered plants and animals. At a minimum, BLM must not allow oil and gas activities in critical habitat and areas known to be occupied by these special status species.

Since BLM's last planning for the Central Coast and Bakersfield areas, California has enacted significant protective measures limiting oil and gas activities. For one, California banned fracking in 2020 and ceased issuing fracking permits in 2024. Should BLM allow new fossil fuel development, it must adhere to California law and the wishes of its residents and not allow fracking on lands BLM administers in the State.

BLM must also adhere to the landmark law Senate Bill (SB) 1137, which requires a 3,200-foot setback between new and reworked oil and gas wells and facilities and all homes, schools, and other sensitive receptors. Another bill, Assembly Bill (AB) 617 (2017), created a Community Air Protection Program that is focused on reducing exposure in communities most impacted by air pollution. BLM must require operators to adhere to these requirements as well.

In the name of community wellbeing and health, air and water quality, ecosystems and wildlife, and the climate, we demand that you not open additional areas in BLM's Central Coast and Bakersfield planning areas for fossil fuel development. We also urge you to consider the alternative of a managed decline of existing fossil fuel development within these two planning areas.

(Citations in this letter available upon request. Email Gary Lasky at tehipite.chapter@gmail.com)

