September 29, 2020

Chairman Raúl Grijalva

House Natural Resources Committee

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Rob Bishop

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Dear Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of our collective millions of members and supporters, we write to offer support for H.R. 3225, the Restoring Community Input and Public Protections in Oil and Gas Leasing Act, scheduled for a committee markup on September 30th. This legislation would help to fix a broken oil and gas leasing system by providing transparency, protecting American taxpayers, and safeguarding our public lands, waters, and wildlife for future generations.

We need a real plan to address climate change and we can start with something that the federal government should manage for everyone’s benefit: our shared public lands. In contradiction to the multiple use mandate, oil and gas development is the dominant use of our public lands and has been for decades. Other uses of public lands such as conservation, recreation and even renewable energy development are being shortchanged as a result. From stockpiled leases to drilling permits that sit in limbo for decades, the oil and gas industry’s ability to disregard land uses outside of extraction development is well known.

H.R. 3225 is a first step toward reducing the primacy of fossil energy development and returning these lands to the multiple uses for which they were intended. It does so by limiting the size and frequency of federal oil and gas lease sales and eliminating noncompetitive leasing, a practice that allows for public lands not sold at competitive auction to be made available on a first-come, first-serve basis for only $1.50 per acre. In addition, H.R. 3225 requires the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service to continue to manage lands under lease for multiple-uses, including conservation and recreation. This ensures that even when lands are under oil and gas lease, they are still managed for other uses such as outdoor recreation and wildlife conservation.

Not only has the public been shortchanged by current fossil-friendly land management prioritization, it is also losing out on fiscal contributions from these lands. The public is promised “fair market value” whenever oil and gas is produced from public lands. This means that the federal government should be routinely evaluating and strengthening its fiscal policies – including updating royalty rates, rental rates, and minimum bids – to ensure that taxpayers, and not private interests, are the primary beneficiaries of public lands development. However, the Department of the Interior has not updated fiscal policies in decades. H.R. 3225 would modernize these policies and better protect American taxpayers by ensuring they receive “fair market value” for oil and gas production on public lands.

The oil and gas leasing system also lacks transparency and numerous barriers stifle public participation. The current administration has further suppressed the public’s opportunity to weigh in on oil and gas leasing decisions, shortening comment periods and foregoing adequate public notice before leasing occurs. Additionally, an anonymous bidding system is used, making it easier for oil and gas companies to shield their identities when nominating public lands for leasing. As a result, the public is left in the dark regarding who is trying to lease and whether or not they have a history of polluting our air, water, or public lands. H.R. 3225 would require individuals or companies to disclose their identity when nominating or bidding on parcels to lease and guarantee that the public has input opportunities regarding how public lands are managed, creating a more transparent oil and gas leasing system.

H.R. 3225 would help put the American public first by ensuring a fair market value for use of public lands, improving transparency, protecting natural and cultural resources, protecting land owners, and slowing down the rush to lease in the name of “energy dominance.” For these reasons we encourage all Members to vote “yes” and support the Restoring Community Input and Public Protections in Oil and Gas Leasing Act.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Earthjustice

Friends of the Earth

League of Conservation Voters

National Parks Conservation Association

Natural Resources Defense Council

Nevada Wildlife Federation

The Wilderness Society

Western Colorado Alliance for Community Action

Western Organization of Resource Councils