



## Bicameral End Speculative Oil and Gas Leasing Act

*Introduced by Rep. Susie Lee (D-NV) and Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV)*

### Why do we need this bill?

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees energy and mineral resource development on approximately 245 million acres of federal onshore lands and 700 million acres of subsurface federal minerals held by the BLM, the U.S. Forest Service and other federal agencies and surface owners.

Unfortunately, since 2012, 55 percent of the federal oil and gas leases sold have been on lands with low or no potential for energy development, known as “low-potential lands.”<sup>i</sup> The reckless leasing of these lands has led to a number of wasteful administrative costs as the BLM and other federal and state agencies are burdened with the tasks of reviewing dubious nominations, monitoring any resulting leases, as well as diverting limited resources and staff time when there is neither funding nor staff to spare.

Case in point: The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported in November 2021 that two-thirds of the total acreage nominated for onshore oil and gas leasing nationwide from 2009 through 2019 — or about 60.7 million out of 86.8 million acres — was in Nevada, a state with limited oil and gas resources. It took BLM staff over five years to review and process the 28 million acres nominated in Nevada in 2014 alone, most of which did not result in any energy production. To be sure, of the nearly 61 million acres nominated in Nevada across the 10-year period studied by the GAO, only 3.6 million acres were leased.<sup>ii</sup>

To add insult to injury, many of the federal leases that the oil and gas industry has acquired are leases that have been left to gather dust. Nearly 50 percent of all leases in the West — spanning 9.9 million acres — are idle leases, with the iconic landscapes they encompass frequently left neglected and the unique cultural and natural resources of these storied places likewise left largely unprotected.<sup>iii</sup>

### What does this bill do?

The bicameral *End Speculative Oil and Gas Leasing Act* puts a stop to the practice of leasing low-potential lands by requiring the BLM to assess all lands’ mineral development potential before offering up lands for lease — as well as by prohibiting leasing on any lands found to have low or no development potential. This solves each of the problems associated with leasing low-potential lands:

- **Prevents unproductive speculation.** Because public lands will no longer be needlessly encumbered by speculative property interests, the BLM and other government agencies will save time and money that is currently spent administering leases that generate little or no revenue, and the federal oil and gas program will be able to more effectively and efficiently focus on managing leases that generate real returns for taxpayers.
- **Mitigates environmental risk.** As federal oil and gas leases will only be issued where development is likely to occur, the BLM can accurately determine appropriate stipulations for all leases. This will avoid the current practice of issuing leases on low-potential lands with inadequate environmental safeguards.
- **Reduces opportunity costs.** Prohibiting oil and gas leasing on low-potential lands will allow the BLM to manage these lands for other, better uses, ranging from conservation to recreation to renewable energy deployment.

The *End Speculative Oil and Gas Leasing Act* facilitates the prioritization of oil and gas development and exploration where there is a high likelihood of actually finding and harnessing significant oil and gas resources — while casting off the unacceptable economic and environmental burden that speculative oil and gas leasing has placed not just on Nevadans, but on the backs of taxpayers nationwide.

## **Endorsements:**

- **Coalition to Protect America's National Parks**
- **Colorado Fiscal Institute**
- **Colorado Wildlife Federation**
- **Conservation Lands Foundation**
- **Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship**
- **Dakota Resource Council**
- **Earthjustice**
- **Earthworks**
- **Friends of Nevada Wilderness**
- **Hispanics Enjoying Camping Hunting and the Outdoors (HECHO)**
- **Hispanic Access Foundation**
- **League of Conservation Voters**
- **Montana Wildlife Federation**
- **National Parks Conservation Association**
- **National Wildlife Federation**
- **Natural Resources Defense Council**
- **Nevada Conservation League**
- **Nevada Wildlife Federation**
- **Northern Plains Resource Council**
- **Public Lands Solutions**
- **Rocky Mountain Wild**
- **Sierra Club**
- **Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance**
- **Taxpayers for Common Sense**
- **The Wilderness Society**
- **Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership**
- **Trout Unlimited**
- **Vet Voice Foundation**
- **Western Colorado Alliance**
- **Western Organization of Resource Councils**
- **Wilderness Workshop**
- **Wild Montana**
- **Wyoming Outdoor Council**

"Speculative oil and gas leasing is a bad deal for Nevada. We support Senator Cortez Masto and Representative Lee's efforts to advance a bill that would put an end to this wasteful practice and enhance the management of more sustainable revenue-generating activities on our public lands like hunting, fishing, tourism, and outdoor recreation. This bill is an urgently needed solution to a problem that has plagued our public lands, taxpayers, and local economies for years. When passed, this bill will play an essential part in ensuring the protection of our public spaces and complements our nation's leadership in clean energy generation."

**Angelyn Tabalba, Communications Director, Nevada Conservation League**

"Trout Unlimited has long advocated for responsible energy development that is balanced with other multiple uses, such as recreation and hunting and fishing. Unfortunately, the current oil and gas leasing system encourages speculation and creates unnecessary conflicts with fish and wildlife habitat. We thank Representative Lee and Senator Cortez Masto for addressing speculative leasing and ensuring that conservation gets a fair shake when oil and gas leasing decisions are being made for our public lands."

**Corey Fisher, Public Lands Policy Director, Trout Unlimited**

"It's past time we stop giving handouts and first dibs to oil and gas companies on public lands. This bill will help rein in companies who are hoarding millions of acres of public lands that could instead support things like climate resilience, conservation, responsibly deploying renewable energy, or the nearly \$900 billion outdoor recreation industry that's helping local economies across the West. We're counting on Congress to pass this bill to start adding some fairness and balance into the way BLM manages public lands — helping ensure they benefit all people, not just oil and gas CEOs."

**Justin Meuse, Government Relations Director, The Wilderness Society**

**For more information or to cosponsor or endorse this bill**, please contact Mark Coombs in Congresswoman Susie Lee's office at [mark.coombs@mail.house.gov](mailto:mark.coombs@mail.house.gov).

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<sup>i</sup> [\*Little Potential for Development, High Potential for Harm: How Speculative Leasing for Oil and Gas Threatens Public Lands, Waters, Fish and Wildlife\*](#) (National Wildlife Federation, Rocky Mountain Wild, and Trout Unlimited)

<sup>ii</sup> [\*Oil and Gas Leasing: BLM Should Update Its Guidance and Review Its Fees\*](#) (Government Accountability Office)

<sup>iii</sup> [\*"No harm, no foul" doesn't exist in oil and gas leasing: Even when speculative oil and gas leases aren't drilled they still negatively impact wildlife, wild lands, and recreation opportunities\*](#) (Center for Western Priorities, Wilderness Workshop, and Colorado Wildlands Project)