# **A.G. Becerra, Governor Newsom and State Agencies Oppose Sale of Oil and Gas Leases in Kern County**

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**Body**

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra issued the following news release on Nov. 9:

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, Governor Gavin Newsom, the California Air Resources Board (CARB), and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), today filed a protest challenging the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) proposed sale of seven ***oil*** and gas leases in ***Kern*** County. More than 95 percent of federal drilling in California already occurs in ***Kern*** County, often in close proximity to California's most vulnerable communities. Instead of conducting a detailed environmental analysis of the leases, BLM is relying on a flawed programmatic environmental review finalized in December 2019 that opened more than one million acres of public lands in Central California to ***oil*** and gas drilling. Attorney General Becerra, Governor Newsom, and state agencies are currently challenging the programmatic environmental review in court.

"Time and time again, the Trump Administration has worked outside the bounds of the law to advance the interests of industry polluters," said Attorney General Becerra. "BLM is recklessly jamming through the sale of ***oil*** and gas leases in ***Kern*** County using a flawed environmental analysis that is being challenged in court. Rest assured, we'll do whatever it takes to protect our public lands and uphold the rule of law."

The ***Kern*** County lease sale builds on BLM's continued efforts to open federal lands in California to additional ***oil*** and gas development. On January 17, 2020, Attorney General Becerra, Governor Newsom, CARB, the Department of Water Resources, and CDFW, filed a lawsuit challenging BLM's plan to open up more than one million acres of public lands in Central California to ***oil*** and gas drilling. The lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California alleges that BLM's programmatic environmental review of the project failed to fully evaluate the significant and adverse impacts on the communities and environment of eight Central California counties, and requests that the court set aside the decision.

On August 26, 2020, BLM relied on the same flawed programmatic environmental review to propose seven parcels of land in ***Kern*** County for a lease sale in December 2020. The following month, Attorney General Becerra and CARB submitted comments slamming BLM's draft Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact evaluating the environmental consequences of selling the above seven ***oil*** and gas leases in ***Kern*** County.

BLM's decision endangers California's environment and the public health of its communities. Hydraulic fracturing (fracking) causes pollution from the evaporation of toxic chemicals that return to the surface and has been tied to an increase in hazardous air emissions in already overburdened communities near ***oil*** and gas operations. In ***Kern*** County, excess pollution from existing operations has significantly increased the rates and risks of asthma, heart disease, lung disease, and cancer in nearby communities. Fracking also heightens the risk of well cracks that can contaminate underground sources of drinking water and creates millions of gallons of wastewater contaminated with heavy metals and chemicals.

In the protest, Attorney General Becerra and state partners argue - as they did in the September comment letter - that BLM's draft Environmental Assessment is deficient and must be revised because it fails to fully analyze the significant effects of ***oil*** and gas leasing and relies on the flawed programmatic environmental review, which:

\* Significantly underestimates the percent of new wells that would be drilled using fracking;

\* Ignores recent studies and best available science in evaluating the impacts of fracking;

\* Does not consider or attempt to mitigate the impacts of ***oil*** and gas development on nearby environmental justice communities;

\* Fails to analyze its proposed action for consistency with California state standards and policies, including California's statutory targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions;

\* Fails to adequately analyze impacts to groundwater; and

\* Fails to adequately consider or mitigate the significant climate impacts of opening up more than 4,000 acres of public lands to new ***oil*** and gas leasing.

A copy of the protest can be found here. (https://oag.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2020.11.09%20BLM%20Protest%20Letter%20FINAL%20v.2.pdf)

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