

Smokestacks and Sovereignty: EO 14241's Threat to Public Lands and Regional Resilience

More Than Symbolic:

Executive Order 14241, released by the Trump-Vance administration on April 5th, 2025, represents a profound shift in the federal government's priorities. Instead of climate resilience and environmental stewardship, the administration seeks to expand fossil fuel extraction, even on public lands. Published in the Federal Register (Vol. 90, No. 66, pp. 21541-21545), EO 14241 directs the Department of the Interior (DOI) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to expedite the leasing of public lands for fossil fuel extraction, particularly "clean coal".

While framed as a national energy security measure, EO 14241 spits in the face of climate activism while deliberately striking against the principles of the balance between climate federalism and localized environmental autonomy. The administration believes that it can orchestrate the desecration of the land of the people for the short-term financial gain of the fossil fuel industry. The impacts of this policy are profound; this article will specifically explore possible effects California and the San Diego-Tijuana ecosystems.

What EO 14241 Does:

EO 14241 threatens to direct the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to fast-track fossil fuel leasing across federal lands, explicitly instructing agencies to "review and rescind any policies that delay extraction in the name of environmental protection. Through its promotion and revival of the "clean coal" industry, it reasserts the primacy of fossil fuel as a supposed pillar of national strength. Under the executive order, projects delayed by environmental review processes may be overridden if they are deemed contrary to "national interest". According to the order's texts, published in the Federal Register, all agencies must identify federal lands "underutilized for energy development" and aid in the removal of regulatory barriers. Thus, stripping environmental protections under the rationale of accelerating energy independence with the goal of actualizing Trump's isolationist agenda.

Specifically, within California, EO 14241 threatens the de facto climate sovereignty won through Clean Air Act waivers, environmental review statutes like CEQA, and bold state-level climate goals. California's positionality as a leader in national and global environmental policy being placed under threat weakens its industry and innovation. By preempting state-level restrictions

on fossil fuels activity on federal lands, the Trump-Vance administration is functionally dismantling California's ability to regulate emissions or enforce environmental justice review. The impacts are not hypothetical, the removal of obstacles for polluters fast tracks environmental degradation within the state.

Within the San Diego-Tijuana region, cross-border collaboration is essential for the maintenance of air quality, watershed health, and disaster preparedness. Under EO 14241 climate resilience programs funded by federal grants are likely to be deprioritized as they are labeled as obstructions of the energy independence goal. The federal government can directly choose to halt cooperation and funding with local and binational agencies. In areas such as south San Diego, the Trump administration is putting American citizens directly at risk as pollution issues worsen health consequences for residents.

The Myth of “Clean Coal”

Perhaps most egregious is the framing of EO 14241 around the myth of “clean coal”. The order is anti-scientific as it promotes a revival of coal as a supposedly modernized energy source through carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies, even though overwhelming evidence shows that these solutions are economically unviable and insufficient in their current form. Most CCS projects fail to meet emissions targets. Instead of helping promote a sustainable agenda they require massive government subsidies that divert resources from renewable alternatives such as solar and wind. By reviving this narrative, the Trump-Vance administration lazily seeks to confuse the public and greenwash excessive extraction. The result of the executive order is a fossil-fuel corporation first energy policy wrapped up messily in the language of patriotism.

Conclusion: A Call to Resist

EO 14241 is not simply a policy objective, it is an ideological declaration of war against environmental governance, regional autonomy, and climate science. As Henri Lefebvre's concept of the “right to the city” reminds us, people have a collective right to shape their environments. We should not give up this right to appease corporate gain and unsustainable practices.

In the San Diego-Tijuana region, resistance must take form through legal challenges, increased grassroots mobilization, and the recognition of power in binational solidarity. Continuous extraction does not enhance our sovereignty but threatens our ability to enact it.