

3 March 2021

To President Biden, the Acting Secretary of the Department of Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Bureau of Safety and Energy Enforcement, and the members of the National Climate Task Force,

We thank the Biden administration for taking historic action to address climate change and pause new oil and gas leasing in federal waters with the Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. This temporary pause while the administration conducts a comprehensive review of the federal oil and gas leasing program is a critical first step to protecting people and our planet from yet more harm caused by the program. We appreciate the Order's attention to job creation in the communities that have been most impacted by the fossil fuel industry. In that vein, we call on the National Climate Task Force to create a just transition plan for the Gulf of Mexico that centers on impacted Gulf communities and workers. We urge you to consider the following priorities in consultation with affected Gulf Coast communities.

1. Ensure the cancellation of the scheduled offshore lease sales and permanently protect all planning areas, including the Gulf of Mexico and Cook Inlet. For the sake of a stable climate, protection of vulnerable coastal communities, and the preservation of ecosystems on which humans are reliant, ending new federal fossil fuel leasing is essential. Please secure protections for the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska federal waters which are too often sacrifice zones for the industry. Royalty adjustments, which were mentioned as part of section 208 of the Executive Order¹, will not sufficiently compensate these vulnerable communities for the climate disruption that is causing extreme weather, flooding, and food insecurity. We anticipate the upcoming lease sales will be canceled but eagerly await confirmation from the Department of the Interior. Fossil fuel exports and export infrastructure should also be paused and reviewed under the President's Executive Order, as they continue to hasten the climate crisis and as the cumulative impacts are felt in the Gulf communities.
2. Ensure restoration, resilience, and recovery of the Gulf of Mexico environment and coast and the communities in the Gulf South. We call on you to create a process for public engagement with impacted communities in the Gulf South, including frontline communities, environmental organizations, and fisherfolk who are at the heart of the Gulf economy.
 - Prioritize the restoration of coastal wetlands that provide shoreline protection from storms and have been destroyed by the oil industry; address the disproportionate burden of pollution that low-income and

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>

communities of color experience; and revive healthy food and fisheries in the region.

- Consult impacted frontline and Indigenous communities on how restoration and recovery funds from the Deepwater Horizon BP Disaster are being spent, and develop robust ecological and environmental justice criteria through a public process for how the remaining funds are disbursed.
- Create a Gulf of Mexico Resources Advisory Council to advise resource management for the Gulf Coast and its waters, including representatives from non-governmental environmental groups, Indigenous, fishing, and environmental justice interests.
- This process should be centered on protecting Gulf coast communities through climate adaptation and restore ecosystems damaged by the oil and gas industry, including from the BP Disaster, ongoing contamination of the waters through the release of fracking effluent into waters, and the land subsidence that is further exacerbated by oil extraction.

3. While we fully support an end to new oil and gas leasing in all areas of the Outer Continental Shelf, we also call on the Administration to develop a plan that ensures good jobs, healthcare, housing, and food security for families either directly or indirectly, is dependent upon oil and gas development. Thousands of offshore and onshore oil workers in the Gulf have struggled since the rise of fracking, with the industry losing more than 14,000 jobs in the year before the pandemic began². More than a hundred thousand more were laid off after the 2020 price crash, as oil and gas companies chose to pay dividends to investors and bonuses to executives³. These decisions only exacerbate the long-term decline in oil and gas demand, with major producers acknowledging that oil demand won't return to its 2019 peak. While the abandonment of workers by the industry is an urgent concern, ending sales of new offshore leases will not have a significant impact on employment within the industry--federal lands and waters comprise just 20% of total US oil and gas production, and less than 25% of the 12 million acres already leased for offshore oil and gas is actually developed⁴. We ask that the administration develop a just transition plan to ease the economic impact of the Gulf Coast that:

- Provides good jobs, healthcare, housing, and food security for families of oil industry workers
- Consults with impacted Gulf frontline communities, especially Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color, as well as fisherfolk and oil industry workers, and people who have suffered because of the BP oil

² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-oiljobs-kemp/u-s-oil-and-gas-jobs-fall-as-drilling-declines-kemp-idUSKBN1WU1V4>

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/08/business/oil-gas-jobs/index.html>

⁴ <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/fact-sheet-president-biden-take-action-uphold-commitment-restore-balance-public-lands>

spill, as well as communities polluted by refineries and petrochemical plants;

- Compensates communities that will suffer a loss of tax revenue from a phase-out of fossil fuel and petrochemical industry operations; and
- Offers business development support to help the economy of the Gulf South that includes investing in local businesses, recruiting new industries, and investing in infrastructure.
- Employs the experienced offshore oil workers in efforts to cap, clean up, and remove abandoned or orphaned wells and pipelines in the Coastal Zone and OCS permanently. Orphaned wells leak greenhouse gases, while the old pipelines obstruct ecological restoration efforts. Utilizing the skills of our oil and gas workers as part of the restoration and ecological recovery of the Gulf of Mexico is consistent with the directive of the Executive Order.

4. Future proposals of the OCS program should

- Acknowledge that the actual energy needs of the nation require a phase-out of fossil fuels to prevent catastrophic climate change. Additionally, the industry is in decline as shown by the lack of industry enthusiasm when President Trump offered millions of acres of the Gulf for leasing and only a fraction of that was bid on. Moreover, the nation can and must shift to clean energy, and rapidly transition to electric vehicles as the Executive Order directs.
- Initiate a revision of the nationwide OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program that recognizes the climate crisis and offers no additional offshore oil and gas lease sales, and creates a plan to retire existing wells.
- Develop and implement a plan that will phase out existing offshore oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, Southern California, and Cook Inlet.
- Deny permits for fracking on existing offshore leases. Fracking increases the risk of oil spills, earthquakes, and deepens the climate crisis. Fracking effluent is toxic and contaminates the Gulf of Mexico.

5. Agencies and the office of the President of the United States need to work with Congress to make sure there are permanent protections in the Gulf, and in all federal waters.

- The Moratorium on the Eastern Gulf of Mexico Planning area should be made permanent.
- Statutes that allow for no new offshore leasing should be codified into the law through legislative changes.
- Funding must be provided for the needed infrastructure to keep our communities safe including early warning systems, enhanced evacuation procedures, raising of roads, and a rapid replacement of essential infrastructures such as bridges, levees, sea walls, water pumps, and sewage treatment facilities.
- Congress must reinstate the crude oil export ban.

Gulf South residents are on the frontlines of the climate crisis and must be front-and-center for this administration as it develops energy and climate policy, in addition to offering immediate relief.

Thank you in advance for all your efforts to create a more just and sustainable living condition for Gulf South communities. We look forward to working with the administration to develop and implement a just transition plan that helps people of the Gulf Coast adapt and thrive.

Sincerely,

{NAME, Signature}

Healthy Gulf on behalf of

Organization	State
350 New Orleans	LA
350 Pensacola	FL
Alabama Interfaith Power & Light	AL
Apalachicola Riverkeeper	FL
Atchafalaya Basinkeeper	LA
Bayou City Waterkeeper	TX
Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe of Texas	TX
Climate Reality New Orleans	LA
Dragonfly Boatworks	FL
Earth Action, Inc.	FL
Earth Ethics	FL
Earthjustice	National
Earthworks	National
Emerald Coastkeeper	FL
Environmental Stewardship	TX
First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans	LA
Food & Water Watch	FL
Friends of Perdido Bay	FL, AL
Friends of the Earth	National
Greater New Orleans Interfaith Climate Coalition	LA
Gulf Coast Environmental Defense	FL
Hands Across the Sand	FL
Healthy Gulf	LA
Indigenous Environmental Network	National
Ingleside on the Bay Coastal Watch Association, Inc.	TX
M-W & Associates Environmental Policy	LA
ManaSota-88, Inc.	FL
Mobile Baykeeper	AL

Okaloosa County Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida	FL
Panhandle Watershed Alliance	FL
Progress Florida	FL
Rise St. James	LA
San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper	TX
Sierra Club	TX
Society of Native Nations	TX
Steps Coalition	MS
Students Protecting America's Animals & the Environment - Cypress Falls HS	TX
Suncoast Waterkeeper	FL
Sunrise Dallas	TX
Sunrise Tulane	LA
Texas Campaign for the Environment	TX
The People's Justice Council	AL
Turtle Island Restoration Network	TX
Waterkeeper Alliance	NY
GreenLatinos	National
Sunrise Movement New Orleans	LA
Center for International Environmental Law	International
Center for Biological Diversity	National
Louisiana Bucket Brigade	LA
Inclusive Louisiana	LA
Pearl Riverkeeper	MS