

September 12, 2018

Mr. Michael Courtney
Acting Nevada State Director
Bureau of Land Management
Nevada State Office
1340 Financial Boulevard
Reno, NV 89502

Dear Acting Director Courtney:

I am writing in regards to the prospect of opening 202 parcels of public land to oil and gas leasing in northeastern Nevada. These parcels amount to 426,531 acres of land and is currently scheduled to have lease sales by the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Ely District on December 11, 2018. Spanning across Nevada's unique basin-and-range topography, this land consists of various mountain ranges and arid valleys that provide a stronghold for fragile fish and wildlife species. For these reasons, I am deeply concerned about the long standing effects that expansive oil and gas drilling could pose on the habitats of these species. This is a highly sensitive and pristine part of Nevada that would forever be damaged by oil and gas development.

Likewise, I am deeply concerned by this Administration's trend of offering Nevada's public lands that have little to no potential for drilling while generating little interest from industry. Over the last twenty months in Nevada, the BLM has offered roughly 1.4 million acres for lease, but only approximately 136,000 acres – less than 10 percent – have sold. Specific to the BLM's Ely District in December of 2017, that office offered 208 parcels for lease that spanned nearly 389,000 acres of public land. Bids were received on just 17 parcels spanning 33,483 acres, comprising just 8.6 percent of the lands offered.

Just yesterday, the BLM conducted a massive oil and gas lease sale in Nevada's White Pine, Nye, and Lincoln Counties, along with small portions of Eureka and Elko Counties. In total, industry did not bid on ANY of the 295,000 acres offered for lease.

However, this trend is not limited to Nevada, as the BLM has routinely offered lands with low or no potential for lease throughout the country, most of which are not selling. The BLM has offered close to 13 million acres of public land nationwide to be available for oil and gas production activities last year, while only 1.5 million acres, or less than 12 percent of those

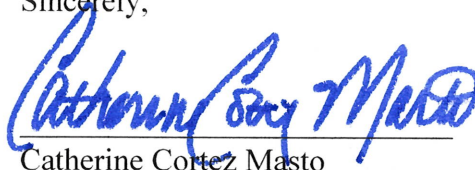
lands, received bids from interested energy companies. This is important because once these lands are leased, it can preclude other revenue-generating or conservation-oriented uses.

The underwhelming outcomes that stem from these offerings raises questions about the taxpayer resources dedicated to these sales and whether the BLM should instead be focused on managing these lands for other possible uses. I am concerned that the low demand for new places to drill, coupled by the large push by this Administration to provide increased amount of land to be available for oil and gas development purposes, will ultimately have long-lasting detrimental effects on the other multiple-use mission priorities of the BLM – particularly habitat conservation and recreational management.

Public lands are a vital part of Nevada’s economy, welcoming thousands of Nevadans and tourists from across the globe each year. Outdoor enthusiasts come to Nevada for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation, funneling billions of dollars into Nevada’s economy. However, by placing such a large emphasis on the leasing of these lands, the BLM is allowing for the oil and gas industry to determine the fate of western public lands, the vast majority of which are far better suited for recreation and necessary for conservation.

I ask for your justification for opening these parcels and for the continuing rationale of moving forward with these seemingly indiscriminate lease sales in light of such low response. I take great pride in our state’s beautiful landscape and will continue to advocate for its protection, as I strongly believe that our public lands should be managed for the benefit of all Nevadans. Public lands are a way of life in Nevada, and I intend to keep it that way.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator