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## **Secretary Salazar Launches Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reforms to Improve Certainty, Reduce Conflicts and Restore Balance on U.S. Lands** *Reforms Include New Guidance to BLM Field Managers; New Environmental Review Policy; and New DOI Energy Reform Team*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Citing a need to improve certainty and order in oil and gas leasing on U.S. public lands, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced several reforms that the Bureau of Land Management will undertake to improve protections for land, water, and wildlife and reduce potential conflicts that can lead to costly and time-consuming protests and litigation of leases. Interior will also establish a new Energy Reform Team to identify and implement important energy management reforms.

“The previous Administration’s ‘anywhere, anyhow’ policy on oil and gas development ran afoul of communities, carved up the landscape, and fueled costly conflicts that created uncertainty for investors and industry,” said Secretary Salazar. “We need a fresh look – from inside the federal government and from outside – at how we can better manage Americans’ energy resources. The new guidance BLM is issuing for field managers will help bring clarity, consistency, and public engagement to the onshore oil and gas leasing process while balancing the many resource values that the Bureau of Land Management is entrusted with protecting on behalf of the American people. In addition, with the help of our new Energy Reform Team, we will improve the Department’s internal operations to better manage publicly owned energy resources and the revenues they produce.”

Many of the reforms that the Bureau of Land Management will undertake follow the recommendations of an [interdisciplinary review team](#) that studied a controversial 2008 oil and gas lease sale in Utah.

Under the [reformed oil and gas leasing policy](#), BLM will provide:

- Comprehensive interdisciplinary reviews that take into account site-specific considerations for individual lease sales. Resource Management Plans will continue to provide programmatic-level guidance, but individual parcels nominated for leasing will undergo increased internal and external coordination, public participation, interdisciplinary review of available information,

confirmation of Resource Management Plan conformance as well as site visits to parcels when necessary;

- Greater public involvement in developing Master Leasing and Development Plans for areas where intensive new oil and gas extraction is anticipated so that other important natural resource values can be fully considered prior to making an irreversible commitment to develop an area;
- Leadership in identifying areas where new oil and gas leasing will occur. The BLM will continue to accept industry expressions of interest regarding where to offer leases, but will emphasize leasing in already-developed areas and will plan carefully for leasing and development in new areas.

BLM Director Bob Abbey said the increased opportunity for public participation and a more thorough environmental review process and documentation can help reduce the number of protests filed as well as enhance BLM's ability to resolve protests prior to lease sales. A comparison of the new guidance with current policy can be found [here](#).

“The new approach can help restore certainty and predictability to a system currently burdened by constant legal challenges and protests,” said Abbey. “It will also support the BLM's multiple-use mission, which requires management of the public lands to provide opportunities for activities such as recreation, conservation, and energy development—both conventional and renewable.”

BLM will also issue guidance regarding the use of categorical exclusions, or CXs, established by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and that allow the bureau to approve some oil and gas development activities based on existing environmental or planning analysis. Under the new policy, in accordance with White House Council on Environmental Quality guidelines, BLM will not use these CX's in cases involving “extraordinary circumstances” such as impacts to protected species, historic or cultural resources, or human health and safety.

Salazar also issued a [Secretarial Order](#) establishing an Energy Reform Team within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management that will identify and oversee implementation of energy reforms.

“The creation of the new Team focuses on our important stewardship responsibility in the management of the nation's energy resources,” said Wilma Lewis, Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management. “Through its work, the team will promote efficiency and effectiveness in the development of renewable and conventional energy resources, so that we can be properly accountable to the American public.”

Under the Assistant Secretary's direction, the Energy Reform Team will provide greater coordination and improved accountability to ensure the orderly, efficient, responsible and timely development of public resources critical for our national energy security. Through its own efforts, as well as by considering good ideas from stakeholders, industry, and the public, the Team will help ensure that Interior is a responsible steward of the public resources it manages and obtains fair value for energy resources owned by the public.

The new oil and gas leasing guidance and CX guidance will be implemented once BLM has completed final internal reviews.

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