

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 19, 2021

Contact: Aidan O'Shea, Public Justice

aoshea@publicjustice.net

Western Businesses Intervene to Oppose Challenge to Biden Executive Order Pausing BLM Land Leasing for Oil & Gas

In statements to court, businesses emphasize that unchecked fossil fuel extraction is a threat to western economies and jobs

A coalition of businesses from across the rural west, or that depend upon public lands, [are requesting to intervene](#) to help defend the landmark January executive order that paused leasing of public lands for fossil fuel extraction. Oil & gas corporations have challenged the leasing pause order, issued by President Biden one week after the inauguration day to address the climate crisis. The pause will facilitate a comprehensive and long-overdue review of the federal oil and gas leasing program by the Department of the Interior. According to a 2018 federal government report, fossil fuels extracted from federal lands contribute about ¼ of all U.S. greenhouse gas pollution.

Alterra Mountain Company (ski-area ownership group, multiple states), Aspen Skiing Company (Colo.), Hunt to Eat (retailer/outfitter, multiple states), Roan Creek Ranch (livestock operation, Colo.), Thistle Whistle Farm (small farm, Colo.), and Western Spirit Cycling (outfitter, Utah) are emphasizing to the U.S. District Court for the District of Wyoming today that their businesses rely fundamentally on clean air and water that are degraded when lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management are leased for oil and gas extraction. The businesses also note that a return to unabated drilling on public lands substantially contributes to climate change, which is damaging rural economies—both jobs and businesses—in the western U.S. The intervening businesses are represented by Public Justice.

“My company and its reputation depend on public lands, their wide open spaces, clean air and clean water,” **Kathryn Bedell, operator of Roan Creek Ranch**, told the court today. “Oil and gas leasing and development contributes to regional air pollution and polluted water sources.”

“My company and the reputation of the wider hunting industry depend on a robust system of effectively managed public lands, wide open spaces, clean air and clean water, and the associated ecosystem services that large, connected areas of habitat provide to all Americans,” **Mahting Putelis, owner and operator of Hunt to Eat**, said in his declaration. “A large portion of the hunting community, including Hunt To Eat’s customer base, rely on public lands as a way to participate in hunting and fishing.”

“Climate change increases temperatures, leading to extreme and increasingly challenging to predict weather events that endanger my customers and staff,” **Ashley Korenblat, owner and operator of Western Spirit Cycling** said in her declaration. “Droughts throughout the west make trails and road impassable due to dry loose conditions. Maintaining current oil and gas

leasing systems created over 100 years ago will exacerbate all of these challenges for both my company and public land communities across the country.”

“I have a distinct and substantial interest in making the federal oil and gas leasing process more inclusive of the needs and concerns of farmers like me,” **Thistle Whistle Farm owner and operator Mark Waltermire** told the court today. “A leasing pause gives us all an opportunity to put forward our needs and concerns.”

Auden Schendler, Senior Vice President of Sustainability at Aspen Skiing Company, noted in a declaration to the court today that his business is the largest employer in Colorado’s Roaring Fork Valley and that snow sports are a \$20 billion industry in the U.S. He also said that “the threat to our business from climate change may be exacerbated if Western Energy Alliance succeeds in overturning the leasing suspension and requiring the Interior Department to continue offering additional oil and gas leases.”

“[The pause] is a necessary and prudent step that will allow time for a review of the federal oil and gas program, while pausing the issuance of new leases that can be expected to result in the future extraction and combustion of fossil fuels that directly hamper the recreation economy in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, California, Vermont, Washington, and the rest of the country by contributing to global warming in a large-scale, systemic fashion,” **David Perry, Executive Vice President, ESG & Special Projects at Alterra Mountain Company**, said in a declaration.

"Our clients are quintessentially western companies that view the administration’s executive order as a relief to their economic interests,” said **Neil Levine, Senior Attorney with Public Justice**, who represents this group of intervening businesses in the litigation. “When Big Oil & Gas cry foul over a commonsense review of a federal leasing policy that serves their profits alone, the law rightly allows the voices of these other and equally important businesses to also be heard.”

The businesses join a similar effort today by multiple environmental groups that are also concerned with the health of the environment in western states from oil and gas development on public lands.

View the motion to intervene filed today by the businesses [here](#).

***Public Justice** is a national, public interest legal organization that pursues high impact lawsuits to combat social and economic injustice, protect the Earth's sustainability, and challenge predatory corporate conduct and government abuses.*