

Factsheet – September 2020 oil and gas lease sale

The Trump administration [is proposing to flood southeastern Utah's redrock country with oil and gas leases](#) and thus open the door to development of some of the nation's most remarkable public lands. At its upcoming September 2020 Utah lease sale, the Bureau of Land Management is poised to offer more than 114,000 acres of oil and gas leases near Bears Ears National Monument, Labyrinth Canyon and other lands proposed for Wilderness designation in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, Dead Horse Point State Park, and the Green River. Many of the leases are also on the doorstep of Arches, Canyonlands, and Capitol Reef National Parks.

A map of the proposed lease parcels is available [here](#).

Photographs of some of the threatened areas are available [here](#).

What's at risk

The proposed leases encompass some of the wildest and most scenic public lands in Utah:

- Proposed lease parcels are as close as 4 miles to Arches National Park.
- Proposed lease parcels are as close as 0.4 miles to Canyonlands National Park.
- Proposed lease parcels are as close as 3 miles to Capitol Reef National Park.
- Proposed lease parcels are as close as 0.7 miles to the original boundary of Bears Ears National Monument.
- Proposed lease parcels are as close as 5 miles from Dead Horse Point State Park.
- Proposed lease parcels are as close as 0.1 miles from the Green River.
- [Visual impact analysis](#) shows that visitors driving the main entrance road to famed Grand View Point in Canyonlands National Park's spectacular Island in the Sky district would have a prime view of oil and gas development on the majority of lease parcels north of the park boundary. The analysis does not show areas visible from Arches National Park, Bears Ears, or Dead Horse Point State Park, although oil and gas development would certainly be visible from these areas as well.
- Proposed lease parcels encompass lands with wilderness characteristics included in America's Red Rock Wilderness Act. This includes the Duma Point, Hatch Canyon, Horse Thief Point, Hunters Canyon, and Labyrinth Canyon areas.

The September 2020 lease sale threatens to blanket this unmistakably Utah landscape of red rock canyons, natural arches, and colorful spires with drill rigs, pipelines and truck traffic. Ultimately, this will replace the clean air, expansive vistas, quiet stillness, intense night skies, and sense of

wildness, with the sights and sounds of industrial development, and expand fossil fuel emissions that are driving the climate crisis.

Many of the proposed lease parcels are within the “Moab master leasing plan” area, a study completed in 2016 that was developed and intended to provide certainty to stakeholders about where leasing might be appropriate and under what terms and conditions. Unfortunately, the Trump administration has weaponized that plan and is now promoting leasing in a magnitude and scope that was never intended.



Hatch Canyon, © Ray Bloxham/SUWA

Climate change requires a halt to all new leasing of public lands

Confronted with the ongoing climate crisis, the BLM must put a halt to all new leasing of public lands if there is any chance of avoiding the most severe impacts of a changing climate. [In a recent study](#), the United States Geological Survey concluded that fossil fuels extracted from public lands including oil and gas account for nearly 24 percent of the nation’s annual carbon dioxide emissions.

The Environmental Protection Agency [in a recent report](#) concluded that carbon dioxide emissions comprised 81.6 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, or 5.270 billion metric tons from 1990-2017. According to the EPA, the largest source of carbon dioxide,

and overall GHG emissions, “was fossil fuel combustion,” which accounted for 93.2 percent of carbon dioxide emissions in 2017.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a Nobel Prize-winning scientific body within the United Nations that reviews and assesses the most recent scientific, technical, and socio-economic information relevant to our understanding of climate change. The IPCC [has identified](#) severe impacts from the climate crisis and stated that rapid action away from fossil fuels is needed if we are to limit the impacts of climate change. These impacts include, but are not limited to, sea level rise, increases in mean temperature in most land and ocean regions, food security, water supply, and economic growth.

The BLM is promoting wide-scale lease speculation

The September 2020 lease sale also promotes lease speculation. In April 2020, the price per barrel of oil [fell below zero](#) for the first time ever. This is a result of an extreme oversupply of oil, with storage facilities having reached (or quickly approaching) their limits. The world remains awash in unneeded oil, as evidenced by the fact that there are zero drill rigs currently operating in Utah, and there hasn’t been an active drill rig for weeks ([follow hyperlink](#) and see “Rigs by State – Current and Historical”). In fact, the Washington Post [has reported](#) that BLM is moving forward with leasing by Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, while at the same time providing royalty relief to [oil and gas operators in that area](#) because it is not possible to economically develop the leases in this area.

Further highlighting the speculative nature of offer these leases for development is the fact that the oil and gas industry has already locked up millions of acres of BLM-managed public lands in Utah. Utah, like most western states, already has a surplus of BLM-managed lands that are under lease but not in development—with only forty-two percent of its total leased land currently in development. There were approximately 2.6 million acres of federal public land in Utah leased for oil and gas development ([follow hyperlink](#) and see Table 2: Acreage in Effect) at the close of BLM’s 2018 fiscal year. At the same time, oil and gas companies had 1.1 million acres of those leased lands in production ([follow hyperlink](#) and see Table 6: Acreage of Producing Leases).