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Home > BLM, industry, and interest groups spar over public land lease sales

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The Western Energy Alliance (WEA), which represents more than 300 oil and gas producers and service companies across the Western United States, filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for New Mexico to challenge the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for not holding quarterly oil and gas lease sales, as required by the Mineral Leasing Act. Sales have been called off in Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming.

An 1987 update to the law states “lease sales shall be held for each State where eligible lands are available at least quarterly and more frequently if the Secretary of the Interior determines such sales are necessary.” This mandate is reiterated by related BLM regulations, specifying that state offices are to hold lease sales “at least quarterly if lands are available for competitive leasing.”

According to Alex Obrecht, an attorney representing WEA, “the failure to hold regular lease sales consistent with the Mineral Leasing Act’s mandate results in unnecessary delays for-- and can completely halt—development of certain federal minerals.”

Various environmental groups argue that BLM has broad authority to decide when lands are not available, even if they’re listed as open for the area’s resource management plan. The groups view the lawsuit as an attempt to undo the progress of the “keep it in the ground” movement. Michael Saul, a senior attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, voiced concerns about the lawsuit, claiming that “this baseless lawsuit ignores well-established authority for the President and BLM to not offer new climate-destroying leases to industry.”

Sources: Centredaily.com, E&E Energywire, Greenwire, U.S. District Court of New Mexico
