

# Biden orders addressing climate receive praise, criticism in Montana



Photo by: Martin Kidston/Missoula Current file photo

Hundreds of students in Missoula marched for action on climate change in 2018. President Joe Biden, elected in part by those seeking climate action, signed a suite of orders on Wednesday intended to address the issue.

By: [Martin Kidston - Missoula Current](#)

Posted at 4:22 PM, Jan 27, 2021

and last updated 4:22 PM, Jan 27, 2021

MISSOULA — Elected officials from across the Rocky Mountain West, along with businesses and organizations, praised a suite of executive orders signed Wednesday by President Joe Biden aimed at slowing climate change and fixing broken policies.

The orders will double offshore wind production over the next decade, create clean energy jobs and elevate the role of science and environmental justice in government decisions. They will also conserve at least 30% of federal lands and water by 2030 and pause new oil and gas leases on federal lands.

Sen. Steve Daines on Wednesday said he'd introduce legislation to prohibit the president from freezing leases on federal lands, calling it an attack on the nation's energy industry.

He was joined by the American Exploration and Production Council and other extraction companies, along with some other Western Republicans.

"This is another blow to Made in America energy, jobs and our Montana way of life," Daines said. "This action will kill nearly 1 million American jobs, increase our reliance on the Middle East for energy, and will result in Montana alone losing over \$40 million each year for services in rural communities."

However, Biden called climate change an "existential threat" and said his actions would create millions of jobs in the booming clean energy sector while positioning the nation as a leader in new technology and the global transition away from the dirtiest fossil fuels.

He said the auto industry alone will see 1 million new jobs when the government purchases American-made, zero-emission vehicles.

Anna Peterson, executive director of The Mountain Pact, praised Wednesday's orders. The organization works with elected officials across the West on federal climate and public lands policies

"We're thrilled with the forward-looking steps the Biden administration has taken in the past week, and with today's executive orders, to protect

our public lands and to take bold climate action,” Peterson said. “These actions will move us towards a more sustainable future and help boost the economy as we recover from the impacts of COVID-19.”

Dan Bucks, the former director of the Montana Department of Revenue, also lauded the orders, saying the nation’s leasing program hasn’t worked in decades.

“President Biden’s plans to halt oil and gas leasing and reform outdated federal policies creates an opportunity to restore fiscal responsibility to the oil and gas program, and ensure a full and fair return to Montanans and the American people,” he said. “It will also produce economic benefits from alternative uses of public lands and set the nation on the path to addressing climate change.”

Other Montana advocates of the president's orders said the Department of the Interior’s oil and gas leasing program has shortchanged U.S. taxpayers for decades, robbing them of billions of dollars in lease payments and royalties.

Businesses for Montana’s Outdoors said a pause on leasing would not adversely affect oil and gas production, since there’s a glut of federal leases stockpiled from decades of excessive leasing.

“Claims to the contrary are simply noise generated by those who earn speculative and windfall profits from the wealth that rightfully belongs instead to the American people,” said Marne Hayes, the organization’s executive director. “Our current leasing system hasn’t worked for Montana’s diverse economy and communities for a long time,”

The organization claims that 65% of all oil and gas leases in Montana, which cover 1.2 million acres of public lands, are currently not being used. They also said there’s not currently a single operating oil rig in the state.

The Bureau of Land Management has sold more than 200,000 acres of public lands in Montana through a non-competitive process for just \$1.50 an acre.

“It makes no economic sense to lease public lands that have no oil and gas potential when land management agencies could instead be looking at how those lands could be used in service of creating more jobs and supporting more businesses that rely on our outdoor recreation economy,” Hayes said.

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