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## Avon council to consider supporting Biden pause on oil and gas leases

Mountain Pact urging towns to pass resolutions in favor of energy development leasing review

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The Mountain Pact is encouraging elected officials mountain towns across the West to consider resolutions in support of President Biden’s executive order to temporarily pause new oil and gas leasing on federal public lands.

The pause is in an effort to complete “a comprehensive review and reconsideration of federal oil and gas permitting and leasing practices in light of [her] broad stewardship responsibilities over the public lands . . . including potential climate and other impacts,” according to [Executive Order 14008, “Tackling the Climate Crises at Home and Abroad.”](#)

On Tuesday, the town of Avon will consider one such resolution.

The Mountain Pact is a lobbying group which mobilizes elected officials in mountain communities with outdoor recreation-based economies, hoping to influence federal climate, public lands, and outdoor recreation policy.

On Jan. 14, the Mountain Pact [sent a letter](#) to Biden and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, encouraging Biden to halt new oil and gas leases on public lands and waters. The Eagle County Board of County Commissioners and the Avon Town Council [signed the letter](#) along with Vail Mayor Pro Tem Kim Langmaid.

Biden signed Executive Order 14008 on Jan. 27, pausing new oil and natural gas leasing on public lands and offshore waters, concurrent with a comprehensive review of the federal oil and gas program.

The pause does not impact existing operations or permits for valid, existing leases, of which there are more than 4,700 in Colorado on 3.7 million acres of federal land.

### **Tit for tat**

Much of the modern policy on public lands oil and gas leasing was set into motion in 2008 when the outgoing Bush administration [opened up land near national parks in Moab, Utah](#), for potential oil and gas development. A large pushback from the Moab-loving public ensued, motivating the Obama administration to enact oil and gas leasing reforms.

The Trump administration, setting out to undo the work of the Obama administration, sought to “simplify and streamline the leasing process to alleviate unnecessary impediments and burdens,” according to a BLM memo from Jan. 31, 2018, and updated BLM policy, leading to a flurry of new leases.

In 2018, the Bureau of Land Management [generated \\$1.1 billion from oil and gas lease sales](#), setting a new record and nearly tripling the previous record from 2008.

### **Bargain pricing**

But some of those leases were going for as low as \$2/acre, and the low prices at which BLM lands were being leased to oil and gas extraction companies [received bipartisan criticism](#) from members of Congress in December.

In Colorado, bids on these leases frequently go higher than the opening \$2/acre, but about 30% of the time they do end up going for the minimum bid. [From 2016 to 2020, more than 100,000 acres of land in Colorado has been leased to oil and gas for the minimum \\$2/acre.](#)

Correcting the low prices was called out in the Jan. 14 Mountain Pact letter.

“Over the last four years, we’ve watched as there has been an increase in antiquated fossil fuel development on public lands, weakened environmental regulations, and fast tracking or eliminating environmental reviews for proposed projects,” the letter said.

The Biden administration pause will also consider whether to adjust royalties on the oil and gas lease sales.

The Avon Town Council is scheduled to consider a resolution in support of the pause on Tuesday at approximately 7 p.m.