

October 1, 2021

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva,
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Balancing energy development with fish and wildlife conservation

Dear Chairman Manchin and Chairman Grijalva:

The undersigned hunting and fishing conservation organizations represent hundreds of thousands of hunters and anglers nationwide who share in a collective belief that healthy public lands are essential to sustaining our hunting and angling traditions. Additionally, we believe there is common ground to improve policies and advance solutions for federal energy development programs.

To be clear, we are not opposed to energy development on public lands and we recognize that much progress has been made in the field to minimize impacts from development, including consideration of fish and wildlife habitat and intact landscapes. However, many of the decades-old policies that govern oil and gas leasing and development on public lands were established before we realized the spectrum of impacts on fish, wildlife and water resources. Moreover, current policies needlessly burden land managers with frivolous lease nominations, do not benefit American taxpayers, and create unnecessary land management conflicts with fish, wildlife, outdoor recreation. In short, laws have not kept pace with the needs of the public or fish and wildlife, and it's become more apparent that federal oil and gas leasing policies need to be updated.

As part of the reconciliation process, the House Committee on Natural Resources recently advanced several fiscally-sound proposals to end non-competitive leasing, increase bonding requirements, and curtail speculation, including a new \$15 per acre lease nomination fee and an increased \$10 per acre minimum bid for onshore leases sales. Taken together, these measures will help improve the management of public lands, could generate significant increases in federal revenue, secure a fair price for access to public resources, and provide for energy development that is balanced with the conservation of fish and wildlife habitat.

Notably, the proposed lease nomination fee and increased minimum bid that advanced through the House Committee on Natural Resources mirror the bipartisan *Fair Returns for Public Lands Act* (S. 624) that has been introduced by Senators Chuck Grassley and Jacky Rosen. Beyond reconciliation, there is more that Congress can do to ensure responsible energy development. We ask that you also take up the *End Speculative Leasing Act of 2021* (S.607/H.R.2986), bi-cameral legislation introduced by Senator Catherine Cortez Masto and Representative Lee Susie that would focus federal oil and gas leasing on

lands with the greatest opportunity to produce domestic energy while avoiding areas with high fish and wildlife values. While this legislation is not included in the Natural Resources Committee's reconciliation proposal, S.607/H.R.2986 should be a priority for Congress to advance this year.

As Congress continues to craft its reconciliation proposal, we want to express our support for these measures. Energy development and fish and wildlife conservation need not be mutually exclusive and modernizing federal oil and gas leasing laws will help to usher in a new era of responsible energy development. Thank you for the consideration of our perspective and for your commitment to the health of our public lands and hunting and angling traditions.

Sincerely,

- Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
- National Deer Association
- National Wildlife Federation
- Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
- Trout Unlimited