

Dear Representative,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, we write to express our strong opposition to the “Strengthening the Economy with Critical Untapped Resources to Expand American Energy,” or “SECURE American Energy Act,” before the House Natural Resources Committee. This bill would transfer management authority for the permitting of federal oil and gas resources to states, encourage offshore oil drilling while limiting commonplace safeguards, and gravely weaken protections for marine mammals.

The “Opportunities for the Nation and States to Harness Onshore Resources for Energy Act” (ONSHORE) title of this bill essentially hands control of America’s federal lands over to a handful of primarily western states and private interests. At the same time, the “Accessing Strategic Resources Offshore” (ASTRO) title takes an extreme approach to managing our offshore resources by eliminating and modifying common-sense management tools, putting our coastal communities, economies, marine life, and oceans at risk.

Americans value their public lands and oceans. Our public lands and resources--onshore and offshore--should be preserved for future generations, not handed off to the highest bidder. The diminution of America’s public resources to exclusively benefit the fossil fuel industry, while also limiting the right of all Americans to participate in how their lands are governed, is fundamentally objectionable.

The ASTRO title would:

- Eliminate the long-standing presidential authority under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) section 12(a) to withdraw areas of the OCS from oil and gas leasing, except for those areas within national marine sanctuaries, and revoke existing withdrawals from oil and gas leasing that are not in existing sanctuaries or monuments.
- Eliminate the long-standing presidential authority used by Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama under the Antiquities Act to establish marine national monuments.
- Weaken permitting standards at the expense of marine mammals by gutting core provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and overriding the Endangered Species Act to fast-track seismic airgun surveys and other industrial activities in the ocean that can harm whales, dolphins, and other marine mammals.
- Nullify common-sense safety protections for exploratory drilling for oil and gas in the Arctic Ocean.
- Require inclusion of unexecuted lease sales from the previous five-year leasing program in a revised leasing program and allow critical NEPA review to be potentially bypassed.
- Divert funds from the Federal Treasury to a handful of states to create perverse incentives to drill in sensitive areas, especially in the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans.

The ONSHORE title would:

- Delegate to states the exclusive authority to issue and enforce drilling plans, including drilling and well permits, on federal lands. For the most part, states have not committed to conducting their operations in a balanced and transparent manner given that they have a greater financial incentive than the federal government to drive development, regardless of the impacts.
- Give states dominion over lands that divide the surface and subsurface resources between the federal and state governments by eliminating the need for a permit to drill and the opportunity for public input on oil and gas operations on over 57 million acres of these split-estate assets.
- Attack existing protections for sensitive Arctic areas and imperiled species by mandating oil and gas leasing in any area identified as eligible in a future review of the 2013 Integrated Activity Plan (IAP) for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A). The IAP protects some 13 million acres of special conservation areas while allowing for some oil and gas development.
- Eliminate public involvement and remove commitments that ensure transparency during the oil and gas permitting process. It also denies the public and other stakeholders the right to seek redress when land management decisions are made that are in contradiction to the law.
- Provide no definition of “sufficient funds” that must be accounted for before taking on the significant task of managing our public lands. Instead, this bill creates revenue incentives for issuance of state permits and exposes states to significant liability issues for reclamation costs.
- Eliminate enforcement of any federal regulation, guidance or permit requirement regarding hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. Instead, the bill would defer to state regulations, creating a patchwork of inconsistent or non-existent guidelines for fracking and fracking-related activities.

This legislation attempts to address a problem that does not exist. Regarding onshore leasing, industry already has an overabundance of access to federal lands at current prices, and holds thousands of leases they are not using. As of fiscal year 2016, less than half of the public lands leased by industry are under production. Companies continue to sit on over 6,000 unused drilling permits and non-producing leases covering 14 million acres. Despite regulations that require relinquishing non-producing leases after ten years, many of these unused leases are easily extended and held in near perpetuity by industry, paying rental rates that are absurdly low.

Existing substantive offshore safety rules and institutional structures were crafted with significant input from industry and have not hampered offshore access or operations, and represent a continued evolution of management of our offshore activities. The bill would roll back these protections and significantly increase risks to offshore workers, the marine and coastal environment, and ocean life including whales and dolphins, and all who rely on our sustainable marine resources and clean coasts for their livelihoods, cultures, nutrition and recreation. Moreover, the ASTRO title would exacerbate the already significant and increasing impacts of climate change on our citizens and environment.

This legislation will place our valued public lands, waters, oceans, and coastlines at significant risk and curtail public involvement in their responsible management for present and future

generations. Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We strongly urge you to oppose this bill.

Sincerely,

Alaska Wilderness League
American Bird Conservancy
American Littoral Society
Animal Welfare Institute
Athens County Fracking Action Network
Blue Frontier
Blue Sphere Foundation
Californians for Western Wilderness
Center for Biological Diversity
Cetacean Society International
Citizens for a Healthy Community
Clean Water Action
Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship
Defenders of Wildlife
Dolphin Connection
Earthjustice
Earthworks
Environment America
Environmental Caucus, California Democratic Party
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Environmental Protection Information Center
Friends of the Earth
Grand Canyon Trust
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Green Vegans | The New Human Ecology
Greenpeace USA
Gulf Restoration Network
Humane Society Legislative Fund
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils
Inland Ocean Coalition
International Fund for Animal Welfare
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Klamath Forest Alliance
League of Conservation Voters
Los Padres ForestWatch
National Audubon Society
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
New Mexico Sportsmen
Northern Alaska Environmental Center

NY/NJ Baykeeper
Ocean Conservancy
Ocean Conservation Research
Oceana
Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS)
Operation SPLASH
Peninsula Citizens for the Protection of Whales
Redwood Coast Watersheds Alliance
Save EPA
Save EPA Ann Arbor
Sierra Club
Southern Environmental Law Center
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Surfrider Foundation
The Humane Society of the United States
The Whaleman Foundation
The Wilderness Society
Waterkeeper Alliance
West Marin Standing Together
Western Environmental Law Center
Western Watersheds Project
Whale and Dolphin Conservation
WildEarth Guardians
Wilderness Workshop
Worc
World Animal Protection