Recently, the Department of the Interior issued new instructions that will increase new oil and gas leasing by cutting back on public process and environmental review. The changes speed up how quickly industry can nominate and then lease parcels of public land. They will also make NEPA—the process for environmental review and public input—optional for many decisions.

The new guidelines also end the Bureau of Land Management’s Master Leasing Plans in order to “simplify and streamline” and “expedite” oil and gas leases on public lands. For seven years Master Leasing Plans (MLPs) have helped create balanced plans for how to manage multiple-use land, giving all stakeholders more equal weight in deciding how to take care of shared landscapes and helping to make sure that important landscapes for recreation are not needlessly affected. This meant that everyone was sitting at the table and had a say, including, oil and gas, recreation, local business, and paddlers.

The new instructions speed up the process for industry to lay claim to public land while doing away with the public process. Energy companies will be able to bid (as little as $2 an acre) for control of public lands through oil and gas leases that will outlast the current administration.

The ACA is concerned about these new instructions. Our public lands contain vast paddling resources, which may be at risk with new energy development. These changes will be difficult to reverse once leases are sold. There is not a clear way for paddlers to protest the new rules, and once industry has leased public land, they have control over it for decades – meaning that even if a new Secretary changes the rules, the leased lands are already under private industry control.

The ACA wanted to present an opportunity for you to share your concerns with your members of Congress. Fossil fuel development may have a place on public lands, but the ACA supports development decisions made in ways that are balanced and conscientious about other resource values.

Sincerely,

Brett Mayer
Public Policy Chief
Making the World a Better Place to Paddle! Since 1880.