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Environmentalists File Multiple Lawsuits Against Trump

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WASHINGTON, DC, May 15, 2017 (ENS) – Conservationists are engaged in court battles with the administration of President Donald Trump and they are chalking up some victories. Tracking just one nonprofit group, the Center for Biological Diversity, shows more than a dozen lawsuits filed against the Trump administration in the past two months.

The most recent legal settlement has forced the Trump administration to halt plans to open more than one million acres of public land and mineral estate in California to oil drilling and fracking. The victory preserves a four-year-old moratorium on leasing federally owned land in the state for oil and gas development.

The settlement, approved May 3, resolves a lawsuit brought by the nonprofit groups Center for Biological Diversity and Los Padres ForestWatch, represented by EarthJustice.

The agreement requires the Bureau of Land Management, BLM, to rework a resource-management plan that would have auctioned off drilling rights on public lands in California's Central Valley, the southern Sierra Nevada, and Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and Ventura counties.

Los Padres National Forest, California (Photo by notphilatall)

"This is a big victory for California and a major blow to Trump's plan to turn our public lands over to oil companies," said Brendan Cummings, the Center's conservation director.

"Despite the petroleum industry's stranglehold on the White House, these beautiful wild places are still off limits to drilling and fracking," said Cummings. "That protects our water, wildlife and climate from fracking pollution."

The public lands at stake in this settlement encompass "numerous groundwater systems that contribute to the annual water supply used by neighboring areas for agricultural and urban purposes," a federal judge stated last year.

The BLM has not held a lease sale in California since 2013, when a federal judge first ruled that the agency had violated the National Environmental Policy Act by issuing oil leases in Monterey County without considering the environmental dangers of fracking. The new settlement continues that leasing moratorium.

"This agreement ensures that public lands along California's central coast – and the communities that depend on them – are protected from the harmful effects of oil drilling and fracking," said ForestWatch Executive Director Jeff Kuyper. "Our region's wildlife, clean water and scenic landscapes are too valuable to sacrifice to development."

"Our hope is that this settlement puts the final nail in the coffin for BLM's illegal practice of rubberstamping fracking in California without environmental review," said EarthJustice attorney Greg Loarie, who represented the groups. "Fracking has no place in California's clean, renewable energy future."

The settlement means that the BLM must now complete a new analysis of the pollution risks of fracking, which blasts toxic chemicals mixed with water underground to crack rocks.

A 2015 report from the California Council on Science and Technology concluded that fracking in California happens at shallow depths, dangerously close to underground drinking water supplies, with unusually high concentrations of chemicals, including substances dangerous to human health and the environment.

The Center for Biological Diversity is resisting Trump in every way possible – especially in the courts.

From the moment he took office, our lawyers have been working feverishly to oppose every attempt he's made to worsen climate change, kill wildlife, endanger public health and destroy public lands.

To date, the Center for Biological Diversity has filed 16 suits against the Trump administration, including:

1. May 11, 2017 – Lawsuit Asks Court to Halt Federal Wildlife Killing in Idaho

The Center and allies filed a lawsuit in federal court today to stop the U.S. Department of Agriculture's wildlife-killing agency from shooting, trapping, and poisoning Idaho's wild animals.

In the suit, Western Watersheds Project, WildEarth Guardians, the Center for Biological Diversity and Predator Defense – represented by Advocates for the West and a staff attorney at Western Watersheds Project -assert that Wildlife Services has written itself a broad, statewide authorization to kill native predators like coyotes and mountain lions, along with ravens and other animals, without taking a hard look at the impacts of its unscientific slaughter. The program has also never revealed to the public the potential consequences of its actions, as the National Environmental Policy Act requires.

The lawsuit asks the court to order Wildlife Services to complete an "environmental impact statement" and to halt the ongoing and expanded killing of native wildlife until a proper environmental analysis is completed.

2. May 3, 2017 – Lawsuit Challenges Trump Reversal of Arctic, Atlantic Drilling Ban

The Center and other conservation groups, along with Alaska Native groups, filed a lawsuit against President Trump challenging his decision to jettison a permanent ban on new offshore oil and gas drilling in the Arctic and Atlantic oceans.

"Trump's attempt to let the petroleum industry suck oil out of every last corner of our oceans is reckless and unlawful," said Kristen Monsell, an attorney at the Center. "We're taking Trump to court to stop his assault on our oceans and make sure Arctic waters and the Atlantic stay off limits to dirty, dangerous drilling."

3. May 3, 2017 – Lawsuit Aims to Force Release of EPA Chief's Emails, Schedule

The Center filed suit to force the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to turn over the emails and schedule of the agency's administrator, Scott Pruitt.

4. May 3, 2017 – Lawsuit Challenges EPA Chief Scott Pruitt to Keep D.C., Philadelphia on Track to Clean Air

The Cetner and allies filed a lawsuit against EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt for his failure to finalize deadlines by which the District of Columbia and Philadelphia must meet 2008 clear-air standards to control smog. Smog – also known as ground-level ozone pollution – poses serious threats to public health, wildlife and ecosystems.

5. May 2, 2017 – Lawsuit Challenges Fracking Plan for Ohio's Only National Forest

The Center and allies sued the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management over plans to permit fracking in Ohio's only national forest, the Wayne, aiming to void BLM leases and halt fracking in the national forest. The lawsuit charges that the agencies failed to analyze threats to public health, endangered species and the climate before auctioning off more than 670 acres of forest land for large-scale, high-volume fracking.

6. April 20, 2017 – Trump Sued for Revoking Protections for Wolves, Bears in Alaska

In the first constitutional challenge of its kind, the Center sued the Trump administration for repealing protections for wolves, bears and other wildlife on Alaska's national wildlife refuges.

7. April 12, 2017 – Lawsuit Targets Trump's Border Wall, Enforcement Program

The Center partnered with Arizona Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva, ranking member of the House Committee on Natural Resources, to sue the Trump administration over the proposed border wall and other border security measures – filing the first lawsuit targeting the Trump administration's plan to vastly expand and militarize the U.S.-Mexico border.

8. April 12, 2017 – Federal Wildlife-killing Program Sued Over Carnivore Killing in Colorado

The Center and allies filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services over its carnivore-killing program in Colorado, including controversial plans to kill as many as 120 mountain lions and black bears in the state – with fully analyzing the program's environmental impacts.

9. April 4, 2017 – Lawsuit Filed to Save Imperiled Native Carnivores From Deadly 'Cyanide Bombs'

The Center and three ally groups sued the Trump administration for failing to protect endangered species from two deadly pesticides used to kill coyotes and other native carnivores: Compound 1080 and sodium cyanide, both used in M-44s – also known as "cyanide bombs." Cyanide bombs had killed an Oregon wolf in February and in March temporarily blinded a child and killed three family dogs in two separate incidents in Idaho and Wyoming.

10. March 30, 2017 – Lawsuit Challenges Trump's Approval of Keystone XL Pipeline

The Center, Friends of the Earth and other groups sued the Trump administration for approving the controversial Keystone XL pipeline with no public input on the decision and despite the project's serious threats to air, water, wildlife and public health – a violation of the National Environmental Policy Act.

11. March 29, 2017 – Lawsuit Challenges Trump Administration's Order to Open Public Lands to Coal Leasing

The Center and six other groups filed suit against the Trump administration over Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's order opening tens of thousands of acres of public lands to the coal industry – a day after the president's executive order rolling back protections for public health, the climate and the environment.

12. March 28, 2017 – Lawsuit Filed to Protect Wolves, Lynx From PolyMet Copper Mine in Minnesota

The Center, Earthworks and Save Our Sky Blue Waters filed suit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service for their approval of the PolyMet 528-acre open-pit copper mine in Minnesota's Superior National Forest. The mine would destroy important habitat for gray wolves and Canada lynx, both protected by the Endangered Species Act.

13. March 27, 2017 – PolyMet Land Exchange Illegally Undervalues Public Land

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, the Center for Biological Diversity and the W.J. McCabe Chapter of the Izaak Walton League filed a separate suit over the PolyMet mine, in this case to overturn the Forest Service's decision to approve the largest land exchange in its history. The land exchange would give PolyMet thousands of acres of critically important wetlands in Superior National Forest, where mining operations would forever destroy the wetlands that form the headwaters of the St. Louis River.

14. March 23, 2017 – Lawsuit Launched to Protect Birds, Other Wildlife From Harmful Agricultural Pesticides Used on National Wildlife Refuges

The Center sued the Fish and Wildlife Service to end use of agricultural pesticides known to harm people and wildlife on the Tule Lake and Lower Klamath national wildlife refuges. In adopting a comprehensive conservation plan to guide management of the refuges over the next 15 years, the Service failed to consider alternatives that would reduce or eliminate use of toxic pesticides, prioritizing commercial agricultural interests over wildlife.

15. March 21, 2017 – Farmers, Public Interest Groups Sue EPA for Approving Highly Toxic Enlist Duo

The Center – along with farmers, other conservation groups and food- and farm-justice organizations – sued the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for approving Dow AgroScience's highly toxic Enlist Duo, a novel mixture of the weed-killing chemicals glyphosate and 2,4-D posing extensive risk to rural communities, food supplies and the environment.

16. March 15, 2017 – Lawsuit Protects Floridians, 50,000+ Acres From Phosphate Strip Mining

The Center and three ally organizations sued the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Fish and Wildlife Service for authorizing the use of 50,000 acres for phosphate strip mining that would irreversibly destroy native plant and animal habitat in central Florida. The lawsuit aims to prevent mining that would threaten water quality and quantity by obliterating wetlands and habitat for animals already clinging to survival.

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