

# Groups File Lawsuit Against BLM on Coal Leasing Program

BLM has not comprehensively reviewed the program, including climate impact, since 1979; Philanthropist Paul G. Allen Underwriting Litigation



WASHINGTON, Nov. 25, 2014 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Friends of the Earth and the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC), with the support of philanthropist Paul G. Allen, today filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia to require the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to prepare a programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) for the federal coal leasing program.

There has not been a comprehensive environmental review of the federal coal leasing program since 1979. Since that time, scientific evidence has established that greenhouse gases produced by coal mining and combustion endanger the public health and welfare. The BLM, however, has never analyzed the coal leasing program's impact on climate change. The complaint argues that the results of this analysis will compel the Bureau of Land Management to deliver on its legal obligation to promote environmentally responsible management of public lands on behalf of the citizens of the United States.

"There is an inconsistency between the President's declared policy on global warming and the coal leasing policy of the BLM," said Ben Schreiber, climate and energy program director, Friends of the Earth. "The lawsuit is saying, under the law, the BLM must provide an updated programmatic environmental impact statement that examines the contribution of mining and combustion of BLM coal to climate change and consider alternative energy policy options that would help reduce global warming."

"More than 80 percent of federal coal comes from the Powder River Basin in Montana and Wyoming," said Bob LeResche, Vice Chair of WORC and rancher from Clearmont, Wyo. "People living in the Powder River Basin have endured many hardships not predicted in the outdated environmental studies including, lack of access to grazing lands, un-restored groundwater aquifers, toxic emissions from explosions, costly and dangerous railroad traffic in major cities to name a few. A full environmental study will enable the BLM to fulfill their duty to promote environmentally responsible management of public lands in light of climate change on behalf of the citizens of the United States."

"More than 40 percent of all the coal mined in the United States is owned by U.S. taxpayers, yet the BLM has not fulfilled its obligation to manage these resources responsibly," said Dune Ives, co-manager of the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation. "The American people should not have to go to court to get the government to do its job, but we need to do what's necessary to protect our lands for future generations. We are supporting

this litigation because we can't wait three more decades to understand the environmental impact of the federal coal leasing program."

In early 2013, President Obama declared the policy of his Administration is "to act" in leading the world in addressing climate change by "using less dirty energy, using more clean energy, wasting less energy throughout our economy." The lawsuit says, "As administrator of the largest coal deposits on earth, the BLM must undertake a review of the coal management program to assess its environmental effects and alternatives that mitigate or eliminate them."

Of the primary fossil fuels used for energy production, coal produces the most CO<sub>2</sub> per unit of energy. The plaintiffs believe ending the extraction of our coal should be the starting place for the U.S. to achieve the greenhouse gas reductions necessary to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the BLM has a responsibility to supplement a programmatic environmental study whenever significant new information bearing on the program's environmental impact emerges. The scientific understanding of the causes and effects of climate change, and the role of coal and other fossil fuels, has advanced significantly over the past three decades.

Coal combustion for power generation is responsible for 40 percent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The BLM, as the public's agent in managing federal mineral resources, has direct responsibility under NEPA to consider the environmental and public health effects of coal mined on public lands.

**About Friends of the Earth:** *Friends of the Earth fights to create a more healthy and just world. Our current campaigns focus on promoting clean energy and solutions to climate change, keeping toxic and risky technologies out of the food we eat and products we use, and protecting marine ecosystems and the people who live and work near them.*

**About Western Organization of Resource Council:** Based in Billings, Mont., the Western Organization of Resource Councils is seven-state network of farmers, ranchers, and conservationists organized to protect water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

**About The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation:** Launched by Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Paul G. Allen and Jody Allen in 1988, the Allen family's philanthropy is dedicated to transforming lives and strengthening communities by fostering innovation, creating knowledge and promoting social progress. Since inception, the Foundation has awarded over \$529 million to more than 1,500 nonprofit groups to support and advance their critical charitable endeavors in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. The Foundation's funding programs nurture the arts, engage children in learning, address the needs of vulnerable populations, and advance scientific and technological discoveries. For more information, go to [www.pgafamilyfoundation.org](http://www.pgafamilyfoundation.org).

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