

Interior proposes closing nearly 1.6M Colorado acres to oil drilling

By Ben Lefebvre

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The Interior Department on Thursday said it is looking at closing off more than 1.56 million acres of public land in Colorado to oil drilling — the latest in a [series of moves](#) by the Biden administration to limit fossil fuel production that has sparked anger from Republicans.

Details: Interior's Bureau of Land Management described those acres in its proposed land management plan for the Grand Junction and Colorado River Valley areas as having "no known, low, and medium oil and gas development potential." But the department would keep 382,000 acres in the area open to oil and gas development — around 20 percent of the area currently available in the seven counties that the two districts stretch across, according to BLM data.

"This is a draft plan, and the BLM welcomes public input," BLM Colorado Communications Director Steven Hall said via email. "The draft alternative limitations on future leasing do not affect current leases and would only apply to areas of low to medium potential."

Under BLM's "preferred alternative" for the site, the 1.56 million acres would remain open for geothermal energy development, the agency [said in its draft resource development plan](#). Still, there would be about 600 fewer oil wells drilled in the area over 20 years compared with the current plan that has been in place since the mid 2010s, the BLM said.

Taking off the table what it described as low-potential acres would benefit the area's environment and other usage plans, including recreation, the BLM said in its report.

"There would potentially be fewer impacts on resources, recreation, and special designations" under the preferred plan than other options "since more area would be closed to future oil and gas leasing," BLM said in the proposal.

Reaction: Mallori Miller, vice president of government relations for the Independent Petroleum Association of America trade association, called the proposal "incredibly concerning."

"To the detriment of Coloradans and the American people, the Biden Administration continues its push to stop oil and natural gas development on federal lands," Miller said in an emailed statement. "This move, which will drastically slash the number of wells, will have negative impacts for local economies and create unnecessary job losses as well as harm state and local revenues as royalties from production on federal lands are split between the U.S. Treasury and the state."

What's Next: The BLM is expected to publish the proposal in the federal register Friday. The public will then have 90 days to comment.