



June 15, 2018

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
123 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop:

Thank you for advancing onshore bills through your committee that will increase regulatory certainty for environmentally responsible oil and natural gas operations on federal lands. Western Energy Alliance strongly supports these bills that reduce permitting delays and duplicative regulatory requirements, and appreciates your leadership advancing them in Congress.

For too long, bureaucratic processes at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have hampered the efficient, environmentally responsible development of the oil and natural gas resources that all Americans own, thereby reducing the royalties returned to them. The bills, HR 6106, Common Sense Permitting; HR 6107, Ending Duplicative Permitting Act; HR 6088, the SPEED Act; and HR 6087, Removing Barriers to Energy Independence Act increase the efficiency of processing approvals for oil and natural gas activities where the environmental impacts have been identified and minimized.

While oil and natural gas production in the United States has increased dramatically over the last several years, the growth has occurred predominantly on private and state lands while federal lands have lagged far behind. Slow processing times and federal obstacles to development limit job creation and economic growth, particularly in western rural communities.

Companies operating on federal lands need regulatory and permitting certainty in order to commit significant capital. While state agencies typically issue drilling permits in about 30 days, it takes more than 260 days on average for a federal permit which is essentially the same. Provisions in the legislation enable drilling to move forward once companies provide all required documentation and accept best practices. Rather than waiting for BLM to process the same paperwork over and over again, the bill would ensure that wells meeting the highest environmental standards and best operating practices can move forward efficiently.

Likewise, provisions that limit redundant environmental analysis under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) would increase activity on public lands while still protecting the environment. For too long, oil and natural gas projects have been subjected to multiple NEPA analyses examining and mitigating the same impacts over and over. These duplicative NEPA analyses can add years to the project approval process and discourage companies from even attempting to operate on federal lands. Reducing redundant rounds of NEPA through the use of Categorical Exclusions and eliminating requirements for nonfederal wells to undergo NEPA will further encourage American energy production while preventing the federal government from denying private royalty owners access to their property.

We are especially supportive of the bill to reduce the federal nexus to NEPA so that oil and natural gas wells on nonfederal lands with a minority of federal minerals do not get pulled into the extremely time-consuming NEPA process. Currently, NEPA reviews are initiated for wells on private or state lands no matter how small the federal mineral interest. When wells are not on federal lands and primarily access private and state minerals, there should be no need for the federal NEPA review process.

Finally, recovering costs from those who protest oil and natural gas activities just makes sense. Companies must pay for the processing of their drilling permits, yet protests of permits, leases and rights-of-way can be just as or even more costly for the federal government to process. Furthermore, protests can delay or even prevent significant lease and royalty revenues from being returned to the federal treasury. It only makes sense that those who protest, which are usually the same environmental groups that file reams of boilerplate protests as a means of obstructing responsible development, must also help defray the costs of their actions.

Thank you for these bills. We appreciate your leadership advancing them through Congress.

Sincerely,



Kathleen M. Sgamma
President