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Conservation Groups Call on Interior to Protect Public Lands Fish & Wildlife from Uncontrolled Energy Development

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WASHINGTON – As the Interior Department focuses on streamlining energy leasing and permitting on public lands, a national sportsmen's coalition is urging the agency to use all its tools to safeguard fish and wildlife habitat as well as fishing and hunting opportunities.

The Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development coalition noted that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke signed [an order](#) Sept. 15 that supports expanding hunting, fishing and recreation on public lands and enhancing conservation and wildlife management. The coalition, led by the National Wildlife Federation, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and Trout Unlimited, has advocated using master leasing plans and other strategies to protect fish and wildlife habitat through upfront, comprehensive planning and more grassroots public involvement.

A [new report](#) by Interior aimed at what it sees as obstacles to energy development on public lands says master leasing plans and policies to mitigate the impacts of development are among the rules to be eliminated or overhauled to streamline approval of leases and permits.

"The secretarial order on expanding hunting, fishing on public lands and enhancing conservation directs all federal agencies to use the best available science to develop guidelines and avoid or minimize harmful impacts on wildlife. We urge Interior to support effective upfront planning and mitigation policies to fulfill that directive and the mandate of accommodating multiple uses of our public lands," coalition members said Thursday.

A [report](#) released in August by 19 sportsmen's organizations and businesses called for well-planned oil and gas drilling and production by featuring examples of where this has and has not been done. The report, "**Lessons Learned: A Blueprint for Securing our Energy Future While Preserving America's Sporting Heritage**," also highlighted areas where the potential remains to do things right, because of the involvement of sportsmen and other community members.

"We agree with Secretary Zinke's recent statement that hunting and fishing make up a cornerstone of the American tradition and hunters and anglers are the backbone of land and wildlife conservation. To sustain our outdoor heritage, we need robust and sustainable fish and wildlife populations and that means healthy lands and waters that are balanced with development," said Kate Zimmerman, public lands policy director for the National Wildlife Federation.

"Our coalition has always supported responsible development of our public-land resources, and though we could support some streamlining of processes, we cannot support revoking approaches that help avoid damage to critical habitats, improve mitigation, and hold developers accountable for their actions," said Ed Arnett, senior scientist for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. "We look forward to continuing to work with DOI to improve balancing energy development with the needs of fish, wildlife, and recreational opportunities."

"We can protect our rivers and streams and the incredible hunting and fishing opportunities on our public lands while allowing responsible energy development—but finding that balance takes careful planning," said Andy Rasmussen, Utah sportsmen's coordinator for Trout Unlimited. "We urge Interior to renew its commitment to commonsense, upfront planning and siting that involves all stakeholders and identifies where and how energy development can take place."

[Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development](#) is a coalition of more than 1500 businesses, organizations and individuals dedicated to conserving irreplaceable habitats so future generations can hunt and fish on public lands. The coalition is led by [Trout Unlimited](#), the [Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership](#) and the [National Wildlife Federation](#).