

**American Rivers • Clean Water Action • Earthjustice • Earthworks • Environment America
Green For All • League of Conservation Voters • National Audubon Society
National Parks Conservation Association • Natural Resources Defense Council
Physicians for Social Responsibility • Sierra Club • The Wilderness Society**

November 3, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20050

Dear President Obama:

Earlier this year, on January 21, 2011, we asked you to address the wide range of environmental and public health concerns stemming from natural gas extraction and production across the country. Since then, your administration has taken several important actions, including issuing new proposed rules for the toxic air pollutants generated by oil and gas production, commencing a scientific investigation into the impacts of hydraulic fracturing on drinking water, and calling for a special subcommittee of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB) to identify better practices in unconventional gas development to protect public health and the environment. We appreciate these actions, but we remain extremely concerned about the serious environmental harms that continue to occur with oil and natural gas extraction in many states.

The SEAB Shale Gas Subcommittee issued a report in August. The subcommittee found that “[t]here are serious environmental impacts” that have led to public concerns about natural gas production and that “[i]ntensive shale gas development can potentially have serious impacts on public health, the environment and quality of life – even when individual operators conduct their activities in ways that meet and exceed regulatory requirements.” The subcommittee determined that effective environmental action must be taken to address potential environmental consequences, and it recommended actions that – if implemented – will reduce the environmental impacts from shale gas production. A second SEAB Shale Gas Subcommittee report is expected in November.

We call on you now to ensure that your administration implements the Shale Gas Subcommittee’s recommendations as soon as possible by issuing an executive order directing agencies in your administration to adopt the subcommittee recommendations that apply to federal agencies without delay – similar to your 2010 Executive Order directing executive agencies to implement the recommendations of the Ocean Policy Task Force. While additional federal and state safeguards are needed to address the problems posed by hydraulic fracturing around the country, we believe the subcommittee recommendations are an important first step and should be implemented swiftly. Additionally, we urge you to direct federal agencies to go

beyond the subcommittee's narrow focus on shale gas, and direct agencies to implement these recommendations for all oil and gas production activities, regardless of source formation.

Several federal agencies can and should play an active role in implementing the subcommittee's recommendations, including the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, and Energy, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency. Here are just a few examples of the many recommendations that agencies can begin to implement right away, in particular as part of leasing of federal minerals:

- Measure and publicly report the composition of water stocks and flow throughout the fracturing and clean-up process (page 22);
- Establish effective field monitoring and enforcement to inform ongoing assessment of cumulative community and land use impacts (page 26);
- Optimize use of multi-well drilling pads to minimize transport traffic and needs for new road construction (page 26);
- Evaluate water use at the scale of affected watersheds (page 26);
- Adopt requirements for background water quality measurements (e.g., existing methane levels in nearby water wells prior to drilling for gas) and report in advance of shale gas production activity (page 23);
- Design casing and cementing programs to provide optimal isolation of the gas-producing zone from overlaying formations (page 28);
- Adopt emission standards for both new and existing sources for methane, air toxics, ozone-forming pollutants, and other major airborne contaminants resulting from natural gas exploration, production, transportation and distribution activities (page 16).
- Declare unique and/or sensitive areas off-limits to drilling and support infrastructure as determined through an appropriate science-based process (page 26).

As we stated in our January letter, neither federal nor state oil and gas regulatory structures have kept pace with the rapid expansion of energy development occurring in states across the nation. Communities, wildlands, and rivers are suffering significant impacts every day, and deserve better protections. The SEAB Subcommittee has issued important recommendations that should not just sit on a shelf. We urge you to issue an Executive Order to ensure that these recommendations are implemented by executive agencies as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Wm. Robert Irvin
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American Rivers

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cc: The Honorable Steven Chu, Secretary of Energy
The Honorable Lisa Jackson, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency
The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary of Interior
The Honorable Nancy Sutley, Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality
The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture