

April 22, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Cc:

White House National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy
Special Climate Envoy John Kerry
Secretary Antony Blinken, Department of State
Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Department of Transportation
Secretary Deb Haaland, Department of Interior
Secretary Jennifer M. Granholm, Department of Energy
Administrator Michael Regan, Environmental Protection Agency
Chair Brenda Mallory, White House Council on Environmental Quality
Ambassador Katherine C. Tai, U.S. Trade Representative
Acting Administrator Lucinda Lessley, US Maritime Administration
Director Amanda Lefton, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management

Dear President Biden,

The Gulf of Mexico is a national treasure of the United States with one of the longest barrier islands of North America. It is home to over 21 million people—7 million live on the Texas coast alone. After February's disastrous failure of the electric grid and fossil fuel infrastructure, we are mourning the loss of people's lives and supporting the recovery of our communities.

These events are a direct result of climate change. The recurrence of extreme weather events affecting vulnerable communities demands accountability from this administration to halt the harm and take actionable steps toward a Just Transition. The magnitude of these ongoing disasters has left us with a clear lesson: We must transition away from toxic fossil fuels toward renewable energy as soon as possible.

Not only are Gulf communities suffering, but the ecological diversity that sustains our vibrant tourism and fishing economies is being put at additional risk. Our shores host the nesting grounds of the critically endangered Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, the Whooping Crane, the Piping Plover, and the threatened Black Rail. The Gulf is year-round home for the endangered Rice's whale and is also home to Orcas and multiple dolphin species. The Gulf is an important migratory pathway for sea turtles, whales, and thousands of bird species, while its coastal wetlands provide invaluable habitat and breeding grounds for many of the oysters, fish and shrimp that sustain us and provide almost half¹ of United States' seafood.

¹ <https://www.edf.org/oceans/gulf-mexico>

The integrity of the Gulf of Mexico and its coastal communities is in jeopardy. The oil, gas, and petrochemical industries have been rapidly expanding into residential zones. They are damaging precious wetlands and coastal areas and have been poisoning local residents for decades. The construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure on the Gulf Coast will make your climate goals of a Carbon Free Energy Sector by 2035 and Net-zero Emissions by 2050 impossible to reach.

There are over nine oil export terminal projects proposed in different stages of permitting. Additionally, there are close to twenty methane gas LNG export terminals in various stages of development and many new petrochemical plants proposed. Each of these projects could contaminate our Gulf waters and air with the same destructive force as the Deepwater Horizon Spill of 2010. If allowed to continue construction, these projects will lock in oil and gas production and dependency—right at a time when rejoining the Paris Agreement and heeding the warnings of the IPCC should lead us to *reduce* carbon and air pollution emissions, not *expand* them.

Climate Change impacts have already begun to ravage our coastal communities with sea-level rise and record storm seasons, resulting in damages to property, erosion of protective dunes and shorelines, and pollution from breached industrial infrastructure. The 2020 hurricane season was one of the most active and devastating ever recorded, spurred by intense heat and warm Gulf waters. This was followed by February's Deep Freeze in which millions of Texas and Louisiana residents suffered through rolling power and heat blackouts, water shortages and contamination, fugitive emissions from massive industrial breaches, and shutdowns, debilitating the region and causing unconscionable loss of life. As the intensity and frequency of these extreme weather fluctuations increase, toxic contamination from damage to industrial infrastructure increases as well. Our communities continue to bear the brunt of the cost financially, environmentally, and physically. We are still battered and struggling to recover, and we need your action to halt the harm and the expansion of these industries in order to survive and thrive.

More oil, gas, and petrochemical infrastructure will only increase our risk and add to the unbearable burden of current offshore oil production and the toxic impacts from existing industries on the Gulf. This affects people and ecosystems throughout the Gulf south from the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and all of the Texas Coast, across Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and to the Florida Everglades, with specific emphasis on the River Parishes of Louisiana (also known as Cancer Alley), Plaquemines, New Orleans, Lake Charles, Port Lavaca, Beaumont, Port Arthur, Texas City, Freeport, Galveston, Houston, Corpus Christi, and the Rio Grande Valley. In fact, all our communities are being poisoned, and we are tired of being the sacrifice zones for the oil, gas, and petrochemical industry.

Federal and State regulatory agencies have done little to protect us. Many of our cities are in ozone nonattainment. Cancer and respiratory diseases are the norm in economically disadvantaged BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities, especially people living along the Houston Ship Channel, in the Coastal Bend communities of Taft, Odem, and

Corpus Christi, and residents in Port Arthur, Texas, and St. James, Louisiana. These industries inflict disparate harms on people of color and poverty-stricken communities. The people of Cancer Alley and all impacted BIPOC communities cannot just be a talking point for you, Mr. President.

The original Indigenous peoples of the Gulf Coast such as the Carrizo-Comecrudo, the Karankawa, and the United Houma Nation, have long been denied sovereignty, consultation, and consent by the Federal government. This denial has removed their voices from the regulatory permitting process of projects that destroy their sacred sites and pollute their homelands.

We want a just and sustainable today and tomorrow, and we need your support and your swift action to get there.

We refuse to allow the oil and gas industry to sacrifice our homes for profit. Protect the Gulf and stop environmental racism and environmental degradation. We respectfully demand your administration to preserve America and the planet for future generations.

We, the coastal communities of the Gulf demand a new beginning and a New Deal for the Gulf South. We demand a healthy sustainable Gulf, achieved through a just transition to renewable energy.

We urge you, President Biden, to declare a National Climate Emergency under the National Emergencies Act and take executive action to stop all new fossil fuel and petrochemical project development on the Gulf Coast.

Please take our concerns and demands into serious consideration. Our lives and futures depend on it. Our demands align with the #BuildBackFossilFree [Climate President](#) and Break Free From Plastic [Plastic Free President](#) demands, and we support the advancement of the [Gulf South for a Green New Deal](#) policy platform. We strongly encourage that action from the Federal government align with all of these interrelated demand sets to protect the people and ecosystems of the Gulf Coast and the entire nation.

Thank you. We are counting on you.

Demands for a Fossil Free Gulf Coast

1. Declare a National Climate Emergency under the National Emergencies Act

- a. Restructure the power grid and industrial permitting process to ensure adequate preparation including nationalizing the grid, weatherization, and requiring climate change modeling and mitigation measures to prepare for extreme weather events.

- b. Evaluate existing infrastructure to assess vulnerabilities that would result in breaches, ruptures, or system failure in extreme weather events.
- c. Protect fragile environments and critical habitats for endangered species (sea turtles, waterfowl, birds, fish, and marine mammals) to prevent mass extinction events.
- d. Recognize and treat Gulf residents, animals, and ecosystems as valuable and deserving of critical protections, not as sacrifice zones for the energy needs of the country and world. Evaluate and publish the true cumulative impacts on human health, animal welfare, and the environment of all existing fossil fuel infrastructure.
- e. Clean up the 7,000 mile dead zone of the Gulf of Mexico caused by human activity and industry in urban and agricultural areas.
- f. Reinstate the science-based executive order intended to make infrastructure more resilient to future flooding events.
- g. Protect Gulf health by enacting legislation to assess and clean up superfund sites and deny new project construction in those areas.
- h. Demand immediate action to strengthen current requirements to reduce ground-level ozone to healthy levels in Gulf Coast Communities

2. Keep remaining fossil fuels in the ground.

- a. Manage the decline of fossil fuel production to actual zero by 2030.
- b. Mandate a moratorium on the construction and permitting of all new fossil fuel-based energy or derivative projects until a formal review of air emissions, air quality, power and water supply, water treatment, emergency preparedness, greenhouse gas generation, and critical coastal area and community impacts can be completed and reviewed by regulators, State and local leadership, and all potentially affected communities.
- c. Employ a local workforce to cap and decommission all orphaned oil and gas wells.
- d. Refuse false solutions proposed by industry that perpetuate the injustices of our current energy economy. Solutions must end our reliance on fossil fuels and ensure no community is sacrificed.

3. Stop fossil fuel exports and related infrastructure (including petrochemicals).

- a. Ban exports of crude oil, LNG, and petrochemicals.
- b. Mandate a permitting and construction moratorium on all related export infrastructure for fossil fuels and petrochemicals.

4. Shift financial flow from fossil fuels to climate solutions

- a. Eliminate subsidies to fossil fuel infrastructure and industries, including petrochemical producers.

- b. Prioritize the creation of incentives for renewable energy solutions (especially wind and solar).
- 5. Use the Clean Air Act to set a science-based national pollution cap for air pollutants including PM 2.5, NOx, & VOCs.**
- a. Employ all CAA programs to drive carbon and air pollution emissions toward actual zero, economy wide.
 - b. Prioritize the mitigation of cumulative harms to human health, animal welfare, and the environment from all existing fossil fuel infrastructure.
 - c. Require all new proposed energy infrastructure projects to assess and plan for mitigation of potential cumulative harms to human health, animal welfare, and the environment.
- 6. Power electricity sector with 100% clean and renewable energy by 2030 and promote energy democracy**
- a. Require all new energy infrastructure to be renewable (preferably wind or solar) and non-toxic to local communities and residents.
 - b. Make immediate investments in clean, safe, and renewable energy technologies, to ensure renewable energy is available to meet the region's needs over the next decade while fossil fuel production and consumption is intentionally declined to zero.
 - c. Develop and prioritize inclusive community decision making processes in the development, permitting, and construction of new infrastructure.
- 7. Launch a just transition to protect our communities, workers, and economy.**
- a. Provide stipends for training and alternative green jobs for oil and gas workers that want to transition or lose their jobs as a result of banning fossil fuels
 - b. Create jobs and paid job training programs for the development and construction of new renewable infrastructure, prioritizing the training and hiring of local people, especially those previously employed in fossil fuel and petrochemical industries.
 - c. Initiate the construction of new renewable energy infrastructure nationwide in partnership with renewable energy companies.
- 8. Advance climate and environmental justice.**
- a. Direct federal agencies to assess and mitigate environmental and social harms to disproportionately impacted Indigenous peoples, people of color, low wealth communities, and migrants.

- b. Address environmental racism by ensuring that all existing and proposed energy infrastructure and development in the Gulf are evaluated for disproportionate impacts on low income or communities of color.
 - c. Stop pollution hotspots.
 - d. Integrate the principles of landback, reparations, and the consultation and consent of both original un-recognized peoples and federally recognized peoples of the land into federal policies.
 - e. Recognize indigenous self determination and sovereignty.
 - f. Ensure language justice by requiring that all communications and outreach to people and communities be done in the language they are most comfortable speaking, using vocabulary and concepts that can be widely understood by average working people.
 - g. Ensure that all communication after a chemical disaster including incident report, press updates and vital communication is translated into dominant languages of the affected area.
 - h. Establish a toxic alert system similar to Amber Alert to notify adjacent communities within a 10 mile radius.
 - i. Evaluate vulnerability zones and conduct environmental justice analysis when making plans to approve expanding existing facilities and projects that expose further vulnerable populations such as federal housing development.
- 9. Make polluters pay: investigate and prosecute fossil fuel polluters for the damages they have caused. Commit to veto all legislation that grants legal immunity for polluters, undermines existing environmental laws, or advances false solutions**
- a. Set higher fines for polluters that match the true costs of their impacts on communities and the environment.
 - b. Require oil, gas, and petrochemical companies to fully internalize all costs to human health, animal welfare, and the environment of their operations.
 - c. Require the fossil fuel industry to pay for effective and timely monitoring
 - d. Require the fossil fuel industry and regulatory agencies to record and report the releases that occur as a result of weather, storms and other sudden shutdowns.
- 10. Ensure through science-based commitments that the US contributes its fair share and advances climate justice, as the world's largest cumulative historical emitter.**
- a. Require regulatory agencies to regularly review lists of hazardous chemicals, using chemical characteristics and basic thresholds as triggers, and add new chemicals as appropriate through a rule-making process on a short schedule, such as every two years.

- b. Develop accessible national data on alternatives based on companies' assessments and lessons learned by facilities that have successfully removed chemical hazards.

11. Restore full federal environmental protection of all streams, wetlands and other water bodies to the Clean Water Act.

- a. Use every mechanism possible under the Clean Water Act to ensure that all Gulf waters are either cleaned of or remain free from pollution from fossil fuels, plastics and petrochemicals.
- b. End new offshore oil drilling leasing and permitting and reduce offshore oil operations by 50%.
- c. Eliminate the USACE NationWide Permit 12 and any rulemaking that rubber stamps permitting for industrial projects that impact American water bodies.
- d. Review and revise the Clean Water Act to protect all water bodies based on current, accurate, non-biased hydrologic studies, cumulative impacts data, and holistic relationships between water bodies and their impacted ecosystems.
- e. Protect public water. Ensure that any industrial use of water does not threaten the clean water supply to local residents, wildlife, or ecosystems.

Please take our concerns and demands into serious consideration. Our lives and futures depend on it. Our demands align with the #BuildBackFossilFree [Climate President](#) and Break Free From Plastic [Plastic Free President](#) demands, and we support the advancement of the [Gulf South for a Green New Deal](#) policy platform. We strongly encourage that action from the Federal government align with all of these interrelated demand sets to protect the people and ecosystems of the Gulf Coast and the entire nation.

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In solidarity,

Gulf Coast Community Organizations

350 Austin
350 New Orleans
Bayou City Waterkeeper
Big Bend Defense Coalition
Big Bend Regional Sierra Club
Carrizo-Comecrudo Tribe of Texas
Chispa TX
Coalition Against Pipelines
Concerned Citizens of Surfside Beach
Clean Air and Water for Freeport and Brazoria County
Defenders of Somi Se'k

Earth Action, Inc.
Extinction Rebellion ATX (Austin, Texas)
Extinction Rebellion Houston
Extinction Rebellion New Orleans
Fenceline Watch
Frontera Water Protectors
Gulf Coast Environmental Defense
Healthy Gulf
Houston Sierra Club
Humanists of West Florida
Indigenous People of the Coastal Bend
Ingleside on the Bay Coastal Watch
Jolt Action
Louisiana Bucket Brigade
Louisiana League of Conscious Voters
RESTORE (Longville, LA)
RISE St. James
San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper
Society of Native Nations
Sunrise New Orleans
Terry Jeffers-Mayor of Jones Creek, TX
Texas Campaign for the Environment
Turtle Island Restoration Network of Galveston

Ally Organizations

198 methods
350 Seattle
All Our Energy
Alliance for Climate Education (ACE)
Beyond Plastics
Businesses for a Livable Climate
Cafeteria Culture
Call to Action Colorado
Care About Climate
CatholicNetwork US
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for International Environmental Law
Clean Air and Clean Water for Freeport and Brazoria County
CO Businesses for a Livable Climate
Coalition Against the Rockaway Pipeline
Concerned Ohio River Residents
Courage California
Divest Ed

Earth Ethics, Inc.
Earthworks
Escambia County Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida
Food & Water Watch
Fridays for Future USA
International Student Environmental Coalition
NC Council of Churches
NC Interfaith Power & Light
New York Climate Action Group
Newark Water Coalition
North Range Concerned Citizens
Occidental Arts and Ecology Center
Oceanic Global
Oil Change International
Organized Uplifting Resources and Strategies
Our Revolution Michigan
People's Justice Council
Plastic Free Delaware
Power Shift Network
Property Rights and Pipeline Center
RapidShift Network
Seeding Sovereignty
Sierra Club
SouthWings
Spirit of the Sun
Taiwan Zero Waste Alliance
Unite North Metro Denver
Valley Improvement Projects (VIP)
Wall of Women
What We Could Become LLC
WildEarth Guardians