

February 6, 2009

EDITORIAL

## Ken Salazar's New Deal

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar's first major decision — to cancel oil and gas leases on 77 parcels of public land in Utah — could not have sent a clearer signal that his department is under new management. It also was a strong indication that the Obama administration intends to take a more measured approach to energy exploration on the public lands and that its predecessor's drill-now, drill-anywhere policies are a thing of the past.

The decision reverses a Bush administration move last fall to allow drilling on more than 100,000 acres near Arches National Park, Dinosaur National Monument and other fragile open spaces. Mr. Salazar said the leases had not received proper environmental review. It seems unlikely that they will be renewed.

Mr. Salazar also made it clear that the decision was merely a preamble to a broader review of the nation's energy policies. Although interior secretaries have historically been charged with helping the nation meet its oil and gas needs, Mr. Salazar promised to seek a better balance between commercial use and preservation on the many millions of acres his department manages.

This would be a huge change. The Bush administration tripled oil and gas permits on federal land, often in areas with great environmental value but trivial amounts of oil and gas. In Utah's case, for instance, the leases at issue were only a tiny part of a broader plan that was fast-tracked by the Bush Interior Department that could yet expose the state's most fragile landscapes to drilling and other forms of commercial development.

These plans will now be reviewed, as will proposals for oil and gas development throughout the Rocky Mountain West, in Alaskan waters and in areas off the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts.

Industry is complaining that any change in the Bush-Cheney approach would damage its ability to develop domestic energy supplies. This is nonsense. For one thing, industry has yet to explore large areas to which it already has access, onshore and off. All Mr. Salazar wants is balance and restraint, and after years of hyperactive leasing, this is not too much to ask.

[Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)