

**Alaska Wilderness League • American Rivers • Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Health, Environment and Justice • Center for International Environmental Law
Chesapeake Bay Foundation • Clean Water Action • Defenders of Wildlife • Earthjustice
Earthworks • Environment America • Environmental Defense Fund
League of Conservation Voters • National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council • Pacific Environment • Physicians for Social Responsibility
Public Citizen • Rainforest Action Campaign • Sierra Club
The Endocrine Disruption Exchange • The Wilderness Society • 350.org
Union of Concerned Scientists**

January 21, 2011

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

Dear Mr. President:

You have started a national conversation about the role that natural gas could play in the transition to a sustainable energy future for our country. Advancements in resource extraction techniques have significantly increased recoverable natural gas reserves, and in recent years we have seen exploration and development expand at break-neck speed. Federal and state regulatory structures and industry practices, however, have not kept pace with the rapid expansion of natural gas development.

The nation's use of natural gas must be efficient, and natural gas must be produced by methods that best protect clean water, clean air, land, the climate, human health and sensitive ecosystems. While natural gas is cleaner burning than other fossil fuels, the production of natural gas, as currently practiced and regulated, can pose a host of threats to public health, local communities and the environment. Documented cases of contaminated water supplies, destroyed streams, dangerous air pollution and devastated landscapes have become all too common in the rush to develop gas resources.

Absent strong science-based protections, affected communities, environmental organizations, local elected officials and others will inevitably oppose natural gas extraction in many places – including both public and private lands. Only by getting strong safeguards in place early can the industry gain the public trust that will be required for the development of gas resources to move forward in a more protective way and with regulatory certainty.

We are encouraged by your Administration's consideration of these important issues to date, and we urge you to lend your full support to the ongoing efforts of the Environmental Protection Agency to comprehensively evaluate the risks associated with modern natural gas development

and to develop and strengthen regulatory structures to guard against those risks. The Department of the Interior has also taken some important steps to improve the management of federal oil and gas resources on public lands, but more needs to be done to protect our wildlands, surface owners, and communities. We ask that you direct your agencies to move expeditiously to modernize and strengthen the rules relating to the full range of natural gas production impacts.

We would like to further discuss these critical issues with your Administration, and we will continue our efforts to reach out to the concerned agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Council on Environmental Quality and the Departments of State, Energy and the Interior. We believe that the active attention of the White House and these agencies to these issues is important to ensuring that the development of natural gas in the United States is accomplished with appropriate consideration of, and safeguards for, the environment and public health.

We look forward to working with your Administration to develop a comprehensive policy framework for the development of natural gas that is guided by four important principles:

- First, in order to protect public health, the environment and local communities, regulations need to address the full range of risks stemming from natural gas exploration, production and distribution. In some cases, this can be done by plugging gaps and loopholes in existing laws. In other cases, it will require new rules to meet today's changing needs.
- Second, the Administration must recognize that having strong regulations on the books will not do the job alone. Adequate resources must be provided for oversight and enforcement.
- Third, in certain places, drilling will never be appropriate. We must protect and preserve our most sensitive wildlands, drinking water sources, wildlife habitat and other natural resources.
- Fourth, we must boost energy efficiency, increase reliance on renewable energy sources and support the development of policies and technologies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels. This includes moving quickly to quantify and reduce fugitive and other greenhouse gas emissions in natural gas development and distribution.

We applaud the important work your Administration is already doing to achieve these goals, but more must be done. We look forward to engaging with your Administration and interested stakeholders on these critical issues to ensure that the development of America's natural gas resources is accomplished with the necessary consideration of and protections for our communities and the environment. Through an ongoing dialogue and timely action on these important issues, you can put the United States on a path toward more responsible development of domestic energy resources, while helping to meet your ambitious climate goals and protecting the environment.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

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cc: The Honorable Steven Chu
The Honorable Hillary Clinton
The Honorable Lisa Jackson
The Honorable Kenneth Salazar
The Honorable Nancy Sutley