

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

November 18, 2009

Honorable Ken Salazar  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar,

We are writing concerning the need to objectively answer critical questions about potential impacts of large scale commercial oil shale development on water, communities and local economies before proceeding with commercial development. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) concluded in its September 2008 programmatic environmental impact statement on oil shale that the agency lacks the information necessary to meet Congress' mandate in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 that "development should be conducted in an environmentally sound manner, using practices that minimize impacts." In advance of sufficient information to manage risks, commercial development of oil shale could irreparably change local lives, local economies and the environment.

The most recent evaluation of the viability of oil shale technologies was prepared in 1980 by the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment. Despite BLM's attempt to address this deficit through the research, development and demonstration (RD&D) program, there are questions that need to be answered to bring necessary clarity regarding how industrial scale oil shale operations could impact the region and the nation – questions that cannot be answered by the current scale of research.

The best way to gain answers to critical questions is to proceed in an orderly fashion. That means allowing RD&D to be completed and the data analyzed prior to offering leases for commercial development. It would also be advantageous for RD&D programs to be supplemented with an independent evaluation conducted by the National Academies of Science (NAS). The NAS study should investigate, among other things,

- The status of oil shale extraction technologies;
- The likely positive and negative implications of the various technologies for the production of kerogen from oil shale resources;
- The cumulative energy and water inputs required to produce oil from shale, including a lifecycle assessment of greenhouse gas emissions produced;
- The cumulative economic and environmental impacts of commercial-scale oil shale production and associated energy infrastructure required for the commercial application of the various oil shale technologies currently in operation or under development on energy and water resources;

- The timeframe for viable large-scale commercial oil shale production and events that should serve as a precursor to commercial leasing, such as development of commercially viable and environmentally safe technologies;
- Workforce capacity requirements associated with commercial-scale development; and
- Means of ensuring a fair return to the public from the production of oil shale on public land.

We applaud your recent decision to seek answers concerning the effects of oil shale development on water quantity and quality, other environmental effects and socioeconomic factors. It is our view that sound RD&D, along with an independent NAS evaluation, offers a judicious approach to the prospect of commercial development of oil shale. The scope and funding of an independent analysis by the NAS would provide a scientific base for future decisions and we hope you will join us in supporting that effort.

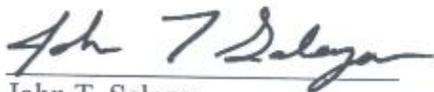
Sincerely,



Mark Udall  
U.S. Senator



Michael Bennet  
U.S. Senator



John T. Salazar  
Member of Congress