



March 8, 2021

The Honorable Alan Lowenthal
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral
Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pete Stauber
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral
Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lowenthal, Ranking Member Stauber, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to express views on the legislation being heard before the Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral Resources on April 15, 2021. We respectfully request that this letter be included in the hearing record.

H.R. 2415, The Orphaned Well Cleanup and Jobs Act

TWS supports H.R. 2415, the Orphaned Well Cleanup and Jobs Act, sponsored by Representative Leger Fernández. This legislation will create jobs through a new program for the plugging, remediation, and inventory of orphaned wells on federal, tribal, state, and private lands; strengthens federal oil and gas bonding requirements; and creates incentives for states to strengthen bonding rules and other protections so that regulatory programs ensure complete and timely reclamation of oil and gas sites going forward. A [report from Resources for the Future](#) found that a federal program to plug 500,000 orphaned wells could create as many as 120,000 jobs.

When companies go bankrupt and orphan their wells – which is happening at a growing rate across the west – communities are left on the hook to clean up the mess, which could cost [hundreds of millions](#) – if not [billions](#) – of dollars, at a time when states are already facing serious budget deficits and can't afford to clean up industry's mess. Many of the orphaned oil and gas wells are located in rural communities that have suffered from years of disinvestment, yet due to outdated policies and lack of oversight are saddled with a heavy bill to clean up a mess they didn't make. For decades, orphaned oil and gas wells have been an increasingly hazardous and costly issue for communities, with insufficient reclamation bond amounts, outdated policies and weak enforcement leaving the wells to sit idle, leaking chemicals that can pollute drinking water, contaminate land and the air, pose risks to public health, and contribute to climate change. Accordingly, [a recent Colorado College poll](#) showed that 93% of westerners want oil and gas companies - not communities - to pay for cleaning up orphaned wells and land restoration.

This legislation takes immediate steps to clean up the nation's orphaned oil and gas well crisis and create good paying jobs, while helping the climate crisis by curbing methane emissions leaking out of hundreds of thousands of orphaned wells. H.R. 2415 is not only a job creator, but it makes an important down payment toward ensuring there is a just

transition for legacy fossil fuel communities, enabling oil and gas workers to put their skillset to use in jobs that pay no less than the local prevailing wage for corresponding work on similar projects. As such, this bill would benefit the health and economic wellbeing of communities, and TWS supports these efforts.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Drew McConville". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Drew" and last name "McConville" clearly distinguishable.

Drew McConville
Senior Managing Director, Government Relations
The Wilderness Society