



Tennessee Interfaith Power & Light

A Spiritual Response to Climate Change

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RE: Department of Interior May 26 Public Listening Session on the Federal Coal-Leasing Program

My name is Louise Gorenflo, the director of Tennessee Interfaith Power & Light, a statewide network of faith groups that spiritually responds to the moral challenges of climate change. We applaud the suspension of new federal lands coal leasing so that the Department of Interior can consider how coal leasing affects public health and climate and how to ensure a fair return to the public for the use of public resources.

The American energy intensive lifestyle causes climate change. The increasing weather extremes of unabated climate change transform natural systems to the great detriment of many life forms, including our own. The elderly, children, communities of color and lower-income people – those least responsible for climate change – are disproportionately harmed by the impacts of climate change and our persistent inaction.

Climate change is a moral issue, the core principle being that we should not harm others for our self-benefit. Our national moral response to climate change turns on our willingness to reduce our carbon pollution even if we must change how we produce and use energy. Nearly all faith communities believe that we have special responsibilities to care for Creation and protect the sanctity of the natural world. What are we willing to do to fulfill our sacred duty?

Americans understand that burning fossil fuels causes climate change. Yet we do not act on the urgency of that knowledge. We behave like smokers unwilling to stop smoking even though we know we create misery for ourselves and loved ones.

Michael Greenstone, the Milton Friedman professor of economics at the University Of Chicago, has found that the climate damages from coal mined from the Powder River Basin are five-to-six-times greater than its market value. The actual return the public receives from the extraction and combustion of coal from public resources is ever-greater suffering.

A study published in *Nature* in 2015 concluded that the U.S. needs to keep 92% of its coal reserves in the ground as part of an overall slashing of fossil fuel use if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. Because 40% of coal burned in U.S. power plants comes from federal public lands, the decision of the federal government to ban further coal extraction from public lands will have a major impact on improving our well being.

Those who understand the dire situation we have put ourselves into through the extraction and burning of fossil fuels know that the only moral choice we have is to keep coal in the ground. Tennessee Interfaith Power & Light urges the Department of Interior to keep coal in the ground on federal lands. We must act on what we know to be true.

Thank you.

Louise Gorenflo
Executive Director
Tennessee Interfaith Power & Light