How Could Our Government Do More to Confront the Climate Crisis

My name is Sherry Pollack and I am Co-Founder of the Hawaii chapter of 350.org, the largest international organization dedicated to fighting climate change. We wish to thank the Climate Protection & Restoration Initiative for their efforts to compel the Environmental Protection Agency to phase out greenhouse gas pollution, and for this opportunity to testify on this critical issue.

The following are comments on how our government could do more to confront the climate crisis.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's sixth synthesis report makes clear that a rapid transition to renewable energy with an equally aggressive effort to halt new fossil fuel development and phase out of existing fossil fuel usage is essential to avoiding the most catastrophic consequences of climate breakdown. Importantly, any energy proposal that embraces an "all of the above approach" or claims "technology neutrality" will only undermine efforts to address the climate crisis and will put environmental safeguards further at risk.

To do our part, the United States must commit to ending permitting for new oil and gas production, prohibiting the expansion of existing oil and gas reserves, and phasing down fossil fuel production. As the world's wealthiest country and largest historic emitter of greenhouse gasses, as well as the top global oil and gas producer, the United States has both the financial capacity and moral obligation to lead the world in phasing out fossil fuels to avoid catastrophic climate disruption. In the United States, this phaseout must begin on the federal public lands that the Department of the Interior (DOI) controls. Nearly a quarter of the United States' greenhouse gas emissions come from public lands under the DOI's control.[i] The DOI can, and must, exercise this authority in its current oil and gas rulemaking to manage rates of production to near zero by 2030. Allowing more fossil fuel development is fundamentally incompatible with a sustainable and livable future. For the sake of humanity, and all species worldwide, we must act boldly to phase out fossil fuels, starting with our nation's public lands.

Further, it is unfortunate that Congress and this administration continue to prioritize ineffective and costly ways of moving away from fossil fuels, which extends the production and use of oil and gas instead of focusing resources and attention on the best and most innovative solutions to the climate crisis. False solutions such as building a vast network of pipelines for carbon capture, or an entirely new infrastructure for fossil fuel-produced "blue hydrogen," and so-called "advanced" or "chemical recycling" processes for plastics, as well as imposing a carbon tax, are not effective or efficient. All they do is extend the use of fossil fuels while helping large,

private utilities lock in decades more profit at public expense and divert resources away from solutions that could actually meet emissions targets set forth in the Paris accords. We must stop investing in these false solutions. Period.

Moreover, we must ensure that the buildout of a renewable energy future does not itself cause serious environmental harm through a massive increase in mining and other extractive activities. It is crucial to note that studies have shown that investing in mass transit, limiting battery size, increasing city density and limiting suburban sprawl, and instituting robust recycling could significantly reduce demand for extraction of minerals. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. Let us ensure the transition to renewable energy is a just transition for all.

In summary, it is imperative that the United States change course and become a true global climate leader by ending the extraction and use of fossil fuels, beginning now, and with earnest. Current and future generations are counting on us.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

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[i] Merrill, M.D., Sleeter, B.M., Freeman, P.A., Liu, J., Warwick, P.D., and Reed, B.C., 2018, Federal lands greenhouse emissions and sequestration in the United States—Estimates for 2005–14: U.S. Geological Survey Scientific Investigations Report 2018–5131, 31 p., https://doi.org/10.3133/sir20185131