DOI Environmental Justice Strategic Plan
U.S. Department of the Interior
Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance
(MS-2462) 1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240.

RE: 2016-2020 Environmental Justice Strategic Plan Comments

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the numerous organizations and individuals that have signed on to this letter and that represent the Gulf States of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, whom of many that have been impacted directly or indirectly by environmental justice issues, ask that you include the following modifications to the 2016-2020 draft Environmental Justice Strategic Plan.

Goal #1 (page 14 of 38)

Addition to existing goals:

Development of relationships with regional, state, and local representatives responsible for decision making processes that can adversely impact, minorities, low income, and tribal communities.

Outreach and education and training programs development for regional, state, and local representatives responsible for decision making processes that can adversely impact, minorities, low income, and tribal communities.

Thought behind this addition: The construction/invite of industry into an area is typically made at the local level such as city council, chamber of commerce, county commission. Permits are often obtained at a local and state level. Individuals need to be educated on the location and placement of industry that could potentially adversely impact, minorities, low income, and tribal communities.

Goal #2 (page 16 of 38)

Two of the existing goals:

Consistent with laws and resources, provide the public with information necessary for meaningful participation.

Conduct public meetings, listening sessions, and forums in a manner that is accessible to and inclusive of minority, low-income, and tribal populations.

Suggested modified goal language:

Consistent with laws and resources, provide the public with information necessary for meaningful participation, including, but not limited to outreach and education session within the community, explaining the process, activities, and any other relevant and related information.

Conduct public meetings, listening sessions, and forums in a manner that is accessible to and inclusive of minority, low-income, and tribal populations including, but not limited to, hosting meetings within the communities being affected at a place and time convenient for the community.

Establish an EJ working group in coordination with community leaders and organizations working with and/or living in environmental justice communities to develop a list of best practices for meaningful community engagement.

The thought behind this addition:  As leaders and organizers in our communities, we are knowledgeable about the needs and challenges our respective communities have to be able to meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives.  Too often, agencies set-up the process in ways that are exclusive and undermine meaningful engagement from those most affected by the decisions.

Goal #3 (page 19 of 38)

Addition to existing goals:

Provide regional, state, and local representatives decision makers with climate change information, education, and training.

Goal #4 (page 24 of 38)

Addition to existing goals:

Assist minority, low income, and tribal populations with the development of job training programs that transition them and their communities from oil and gas exploration and drilling and coal fired power plants to renewable energy sources.

Provide minorities, low income, and tribal populations with climate change information, education, and training.

Other comments:

Tribal Grants (page 25-26) - Native American tribes have received only $68? Please clarify.

The best course of action would be to prevent environmental justice issues from occurring altogether. This could occur with an intensive, comprehensive outreach and education program that addresses the history of racial disparity and the continued misuse of land and mistreatment of minority, low income, and tribal populations.

The Department of Interior Environmental Justice Plan fails to acknowledge the Department's role in creating environmental injustices.  In other words the EJ plan lacks a causal analysis of environmental justice and consequently, as a result, the programs and policies while important, are not capable of preventing environmental injustices and the current global climate crisis that is intrinsically connected to the pain and suffering of so many environmental justice communities in our nation.

We have reached a pivotal moment in our history as a nation and as humans on this planet.  Now more than ever, putting a stop to the environmental injustices that have been happening in our communities for generations is necessary to stop the climate crisis. The fossil fuel industry has been for a long time one of the greatest threats to our communities and is one of the biggest threats (recognizing that agriculture also plays a significant role in the global climate crisis and environmental pollution) to our very existence.  It is thus, imperative that the Department of Interior understand the causal relationship between its management and leasing of our land and water to extractive industries and the environmental injustices that occur across our nation and the fast approaching real threat of climate catastrophe.  The best thing the Department of Interior can do to help environmental justice communities is to create an internal plan to break free from fossils in coordination with other agencies, such as DOT, EPA, HUD, USDA, state and local leaders, AND environmental justice communities.

Thank-you for the consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments you might have with regards to these suggested modifications.

Sincerely,

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