

House Panel Threatens to Subpoena Interior Dept.

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 26 (LID) – A congressional committee has threatened to subpoena the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) over an allegedly doctored report to support the Obama administration's six-month ban on offshore drilling in 2010.



Critics allege that the DOI 30-Day Safety Report for the rewrite of the 2008 Stream Buffer Zone Rule was altered so to suggest that independent scientists supported the Obama administration's drilling moratorium in the Gulf of Mexico following the Deepwater Horizon incident.

The Natural Resources Committee first requested documents related to the rule re-write in a letter dated April 25, 2011.

If documents related to the Office of Surface Mining's development of a Stream Protection Rule are not provided by Feb. 9, the committee will move forward to compel production of the documents, Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (R-Wash.) wrote in a sharply-worded, 11-page letter sent Wednesday to Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar.

An Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigation concluded that "White House edits of the original draft DOI Executive Summary led to the implication that the moratorium has been peer reviewed by the experts."

The edits present "serious questions" regarding how and why the rewrite was initiated, wrote Hastings and Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.), chairman of the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee.

"This is a serious matter that impacts the livelihood of entire communities and the jobs of thousands of coal miners across the nation, and the Department's failure to fully comply with repeated request for information can no longer continue," their letter reads.

To date, DOI has provided 15 pages of documents that were not already disclosed by the OIG.

The federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) is preparing a new rule to replace the 2008 Stream Buffer Zone Rule, which allows coal mine spoil within 100 feet of intermittent and perennial streams, under certain conditions.

A proposed rule is expected to be released this year.

The OSM published the original final rule on Dec. 12, 2008. The rule was challenged in U.S. District Court. A settlement agreement ending the lawsuit set a timeframe for revision.

More information:

The Natural Resources Committee letter to DOI is available at

<http://naturalresources.house.gov/UploadedFiles/LtrToSecSalazarMoratorium012512.pdf>.