

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Center for Biological Diversity v. U.S. Bureau of Land Management

Center for Biological Diversity · No. 1:23-cv-00938-JLT-CDB · Decided April 1, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California considers Plaintiffs’ motion for leave to file a second amended complaint challenging the Bureau of Land Management’s approval of oil and gas drilling permits. The court focuses on whether the proposed amendments would be futile because Plaintiffs allegedly lack Article III standing, including injury in fact, causation, and redressability. The document grants Plaintiffs’ motion for leave to file the second amended complaint.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	April 1, 2025
DOCKET	1:23-cv-00938-JLT-CDB
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiffs moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 15 for leave to file a second amended complaint while a defendant's motion to dismiss the first amended complaint for lack of Article III standing was pending.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Leave to amend under Rule 15(a) is reviewed under a liberal standard and is committed to the court's discretion. Amendment may be denied as futile only when the proposed complaint clearly could not be saved by amendment or would be subject to dismissal.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential district court order
PARTIES	Center for Biological Diversity, The Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth, Sierra Club v. U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Debra Haaland, Karen Mouritsen, Gabriel Garcia, John Hodge, Innex California, Inc., California Resources Production Corporation

TOPICS

- motion to amend
- standing
- pleadings
- environmental law
- administrative law

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

environmental law

administrative law

constitutional law

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Plaintiffs should be granted leave under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 15(a) to file a second amended complaint.
2. Whether the proposed amendments were futile because they failed to allege facts sufficient to establish Article III standing.

HOLDINGS

1. Leave to amend should ordinarily be freely granted when justice so requires, and the court granted Plaintiffs leave to file the proposed second amended complaint.
2. The proposed amendments were not futile because the declarations contained credible allegations of respiratory, recreational, and aesthetic injuries plausibly connected to the challenged drilling permits and potentially redressable by the requested relief.
3. The proposed amendments were not futile on organizational-standing grounds because they alleged that the organizations' core activities and ability to participate in oil-and-gas decision-making were directly affected by the challenged conduct.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Rule 15(a) is very liberal” (at 5)

“the underlying purpose of Rule 15 to facilitate decision on the merits, rather than on the pleadings or technicalities.” (at 6)

“Undue delay, “by itself...is insufficient to justify denying a motion to amend.”” (at 6)

“An amendment is futile if the complaint clearly could not be saved by amendment.” (at 7)

“Because Plaintiffs have shown the proposed amendments to the operative complaint are not futile — meaning it is not clear the complaint is unsavable by the proposed amendments” (at 13)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs challenge the Bureau of Land Management's approval of drilling permits for oil wells in California's San Joaquin Valley, alleging that the approvals failed to account for air-quality, groundwater, public-health, climate, and public-participation impacts. The proposed second amended complaint added Sierra Club as a plaintiff and incorporated allegations from six declarations describing members' use of affected public lands, recreational and aesthetic interests, respiratory and health concerns, and geographic connections to the drilling areas. Innex argued that the proposed amendments were futile because Plaintiffs failed to allege a sufficient geographic nexus or injury in fact.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiffs filed the action on June 22, 2023, challenging federal approval of oil and gas drilling permits. The court granted an unopposed motion to amend, and Plaintiffs filed a first amended complaint on July 8, 2024. After Innex moved to dismiss for lack of standing, Plaintiffs moved for leave to file a second amended complaint adding Sierra Club and additional standing allegations supported by declarations. The court granted leave to amend and ordered Plaintiffs to file the proposed complaint within seven days.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- AmerisourceBergen Corp. v. Dialysist West, Inc., 465 F.3d 946, 951 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Chodos v. W. Publ'g Co., 292 F.3d 992, 1003 (9th Cir. 2002)
- Morongo Band of Mission Indians v. Rose, 893 F.2d 1074, 1079 (9th Cir. 1990)
- Swanson v. United States Forest Service, 87 F.3d 339, 343 (9th Cir. 1996)
- United States v. Webb, 655 F.2d 977, 979 (9th Cir. 1981)
- Chudacoff v. University Medical Center, 649 F.3d 1143, 1152 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Nunes v. Ashcroft, 375 F.3d 805, 808 (9th Cir. 2004)
- Bonin v. Calderon, 59 F.3d 815, 845 (9th Cir. 1995)
- Eminence Capital, LLC v. Aspeon, Inc., 316 F.3d 1048, 1052 (9th Cir. 2003)
- Bowles v. Reade, 198 F.3d 752, 758 (9th Cir. 1999)
- Griggs v. Pace American Group, Inc., 170 F.3d 877, 880 (9th Cir. 1999)
- DCD Programs, Ltd. v. Leighton, 833 F.2d 183, 187 (9th Cir. 1987)
- Carrico v. City and County of San Francisco, 656 F.3d 1002, 1008 (9th Cir. 2011)
- United States v. Corinthian Colleges, 655 F.3d 984, 995 (9th Cir. 2011)
- Zurich American Insurance Co. of Illinois v. VForce Inc., No. 2:18-cv-02066-TLN-CKD, 2020 WL 2732046, at *3 (E.D. Cal. May 26, 2020)
- Netbula, LLC v. Distinct Corp., 212 F.R.D. 534, 539 (N.D. Cal. 2003)
- Kokkonen v. Guardian Life Insurance Co. of America, 511 U.S. 375, 377 (1994)
- DaimlerChrysler Corp. v. Cuno, 547 U.S. 332, 341 (2006)
- Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow, 542 U.S. 1, 11 (2004)
- Lexmark International, Inc. v. Static Control Components, Inc., 572 U.S. 118 (2014)
- Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife, 504 U.S. 555, 560 (1992)
- Steel Co. v. Citizens for a Better Environment, 523 U.S. 83, 103 (1998)
- TransUnion LLC v. Ramirez, 594 U.S. 413, 427 (2021)
- Friends of the Earth, Inc. v. Laidlaw Environmental Services, 528 U.S. 167, 183 (2000)
- Sierra Club v. Morton, 405 U.S. 727, 735 (1972)
- Hall v. Norton, 266 F.3d 969, 976 (9th Cir. 2001)

- *Sierra Club v. EPA*, 762 F.3d 971, 977 (9th Cir. 2014)
- *Havens Realty Corp. v. Coleman*, 455 U.S. 363, 379 (1982)
- *FDA v. Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine*, 602 U.S. 367, 394 (2024)
- *Ass'n of Irrigated Residents v. U.S. EPA*, 10 F.4th 937, 943-44 (9th Cir. 2021)
- *Miller v. Rykoff-Sexton, Inc.*, 845 F.2d 209, 214 (9th Cir. 1988)

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