



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE
JURY FINDS DECHRISTOPHER GUILTY
AFTER TRIAL IN SALT LAKE CITY

SALT LAKE CITY – Tim DeChristopher, age 29, of Salt Lake City, charged with two violations of federal law in connection with a scheme to interfere with the competitive bidding process during the sale of Bureau of Land Management oil and gas leases in Utah in December 2008, has been convicted of the charges.

A jury in Salt Lake City deliberated for about 4 1/2 hours Thursday before returning the guilty verdicts. The trial started Monday. DeChristopher was convicted of one count of violating of the Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act and one count of making a false statement.

“Congress has enacted very specific laws designed to protect the integrity of the competitive bidding process involved in the issuance of oil and gas leases. As federal prosecutors, our responsibility is to enforce those laws and hold accountable those who violate them,” Carlie Christensen, U.S. Attorney for Utah said today.

“We recognize that individuals have deeply held opinions when it comes to the use and management of our public lands. As citizens of this country, we are free to hold and express these differing views. However,

there are ways to express these opinions and advocate for change without violating the law, disrupting open public processes, and causing financial harm to the government and to other individuals,” Christensen said. “Mr. DeChristopher had several reasonable and lawful alternatives by which he could have expressed his objections to the sale of these oil and gas leases.”

“Whether the BLM was correct in its decision to offer these parcels for oil and gas lease sales was not the question which this jury was asked to resolve. The jury was asked to determine whether Mr. DeChristopher’s disruption of the BLM’s auction of oil and gas leases violated federal law. We believe that the jury properly found that it did,” Christensen said.

Congress enacted the Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act in 1987. One of the key provisions of the Act was the establishment of a competitive bidding process for oil and gas leases. The Act established procedures that must be followed by the BLM in conducting the bidding process. In addition, the Act established requirements for those engaged in the competitive bidding process.

Evidence at trial proved DeChristopher participated in a scheme to defeat provisions of the Act by interfering with the competitive bidding process during the December 19, 2008, auction. DeChristopher attended the auction at the Salt Lake City BLM office and represented himself as a bona fide bidder, when in fact he was not.

Evidence at trial also showed that DeChristopher made a false and fraudulent statement when he completed and signed a bidder registration form at the auction certifying that he had a good faith intention to acquire an oil and gas lease on lands offered for auction by the United States, when in fact he had no intention of acquiring such lease.

U.S. District Judge Dee Bensen set sentencing for June 23, 2011, at 1:30 p.m. The maximum potential sentence in the case is five years per count of conviction.

The case was investigated by BLM agents and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys in the District of Utah.

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