



April 23, 2018

Via: www.regulations.gov
U.S. Department of the Interior
Director, Bureau of Land Management
Mail Stop 2134LM, 1849
Room 2134LM
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Bureau of Land Management: Waste Prevention, Production Subject to Royalties, and Resources Conservation; Rescission or Revision of Certain Requirements: RIN 1004-AE53

Dear Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke:

On behalf of Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO), I am writing to **strongly oppose** BLM's proposed rescission or revision to the 2016 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Methane Waste Rule. HECHO is among the hundreds of thousands of groups and individuals who have been vocal participants in the public process that led to the 2016 BLM Methane Waste Rule's finalization. While we do thank you for this formal opportunity for public comment, we would like the BLM to provide a more robust public process that includes public forums or hearings and stakeholder meetings across the West and extend the comment period on this proposal until after this outreach has taken place. Such a process would reflect how the BLM arrived at the current rule, and it is important that you hear from the people who are most affected by the waste of resources: the American people and western communities.

This proposed rescission severely and irresponsibly weakens the provisions in the 2016 rule to cut methane waste. BLM's own analysis shows that this proposal will cost Americans more than \$1 billion dollars in wasted natural gas and pollution, and it denies revenue collected from royalties if the methane was marketed instead of wasted. This revenue would go to schools, first-responders, and communities.

A report commissioned by the Environmental Defense Fund¹ found that New Mexico, a state with 48% Hispanic population—the largest Hispanic statewide population share nationally—ranks number 1 in lost natural gas, for an annual loss of an estimated \$100

¹ http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/local_news/report-ranks-state-no-for-methane-emissions-lost-gas-revenues/article_6ba81fcc-69d6-528f-8d53-806d404bb768.html



million. That means New Mexico will continue to miss out on over \$6 million in royalties every year. That could pay the salary of 125 extra teachers in a state where a third of the students don't graduate from high school. It is no wonder that New Mexico's leaders from county commissioners (who have passed resolutions in support of the 2016 rule) all the way up to the congressional delegation (who have signed letters urging that the BLM prevent this waste), as well as New Mexican businesses, public health groups and health professionals, tribes, member-based organizations, and everyday citizens have all voiced their support for the 2016 BLM Methane Rule.

Under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, the BLM has a specific mandate that “[a]ll leases of lands containing oil or gas ... shall be subject to the condition that the lessee will, in conducting the explorations and mining operations, use all reasonable precautions to prevent waste of oil or gas developed in the land.”² The 2016 rule—which took six years to develop with a variety of stakeholder input— does just that.

Following the law not only protects the public from having its resources wasted, it also cuts air pollutants that cause disproportionate health impacts to Hispanic communities. Over 23 million Latinos live in areas that violate the federal air pollution standards for ozone, according to a recent report by the National Hispanic Medical Association and the League of United Latin American Citizens.³ Methane from oil and gas production is released alongside ozone precursors and air toxics that can trigger life-threatening asthma attacks, worsen respiratory conditions, and cause cancer.⁴ The 2016 BLM Methane Waste Rule mitigates these negative consequences.

Properly regulating methane waste also enjoys immense public support. The bipartisan Conservation in the West poll by Colorado College found that more than 80 percent of Western voters,⁵ who live and work near public lands, support this rule, and more than two-thirds of voters across the country want to keep the rule in place. In Congress, an attempt to overturn the rule failed in May of 2017, despite heavy pressure from influential industry interests to overturn the rule, largely because of the rule's public support. Attempts to undo or stall implementation of the rule by industry and the Administration have similarly thus far failed in court.

For centuries, Hispanics have been stewards of the Earth. We support environmental and conservation protections at a higher rate than any other ethnic group in the United States. We have a strong cultural connection to the land and we believe in not taking

² 30 U.S.C. § 225.

³ “Latino Communities at Risk: The Impact of Air Pollution from the Oil and Gas Industry”

⁴ https://www.nwf.org/-/media/Documents/PDFs/Environmental-Threats/CATF-NWF_Fact-Sheet-Methane-4-10-18.ashx?la=en&hash=4A3812049246B1760DA81E19ABF49BF40BD64E8E

⁵ <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2017>



more than what is needed. The bipartisan Colorado College pollsters found⁶ that a full 76 percent of Latinos in western states want the BLM methane waste rule to move forward.

A simple solution is already in place. By implementing the 2016 BLM Methane Waste Rule that was supposed to take effect this year, we can cut pollution, eliminate waste, improve public health, and increase community revenue. Plus, oil and gas developers can increase efficiency and profits. And in Colorado, whose state methane rule⁷ was the model for the federal rule, the requirement to capture the emissions and find and fix leaks has spurred a growing industry.

We urge the Administration not to rescind the 2016 BLM Methane Waste Rule. The rule makes sense for our economy, for our health, and for the protection of our natural resources. The enormous amount of time and resources that went into developing this rule represent the strength and beauty of our democracy. We urge you not to violate the will of the people by rescinding this important policy.

Sincerely,

Camilla Simon
Executive Director

⁶ <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/stateoftherockies/conservationinthwest/>

⁷ <http://blog.nwf.org/2017/02/overturning-methane-rule-is-bad-public-policy-bad-business/>