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CITIZENS FOR A HEALTHY COMMUNITY ♦ CLEAN AIR TASK FORCE ♦
CLEAN WATER ACTION ♦ CONSERVATION COLORADO ♦ DAKOTA
RESOURCE COUNCIL ♦ DINE CARE ♦ EARTHJUSTICE ♦ EARTHWORKS ♦
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WESTERN ORGANIZATION OF RESOURCE COUNCILS ♦ WESTERN
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OUTDOOR COUNCIL**

May 30, 2014

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

In March 2014, President Barack Obama issued a Strategy to Reduce Methane Emissions (“Strategy”). The Strategy, implementing a key part of the Administration’s March 2013 Climate Action Plan, tasks BLM with modernizing its rules to prevent the waste of methane from the oil and gas supply chain under its purview, primarily upstream production. BLM’s responsibilities dovetail nicely with a comprehensive set of methane reduction actions that also include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and individual states. These regulatory actions can be coordinated effectively to ensure complementary action to drive the maximum amount of practical and feasible methane emission reductions. The undersigned organizations provide these comments to support and inform that coordinated—and comprehensive—action and focus specifically on BLM’s rulemaking to prevent waste.

We do so because effective action regarding methane pollution and waste is essential to achieving the President’s goal of reducing greenhouse gas (“GHG”) emissions by 17% (using a baseline of 2005) by 2020. More to the point, preventing waste of methane – a climate warming pollutant 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide over a 20-year time period – presents a near-term climate mitigation opportunity to reduce the risk of crossing a 2°C warming threshold and thereby avoid catastrophic climate disruption. Fortunately, methane waste can be prevented or reduced with proven, off-the-shelf technologies. These technologies are often economical, paying for themselves quickly even at today’s relatively low natural gas prices. Moreover, these technologies, by increasing the supply of energy that can be sold, increase royalty payments to private mineral owners and to cash-strapped federal and state governments—and the public programs, such as education—that they support.

Put simply, preventing methane pollution and waste achieves a “triple win”: first, less methane in the atmosphere means more natural gas to heat our homes, cook our food, and generate electricity; second, less wasted gas means more royalties from natural gas sales for cash-strapped governments and landowners; and third, by reducing the waste of natural gas, we reduce emissions of climate warming methane *and* reduce emissions of other pollutants that degrade local air quality and harm public health.

Relative to BLM’s responsibilities, modernizing the agency’s waste rules is necessary to comport with the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920. The Mineral Leasing Act requires that the Bureau of Land Management, before granting leases for federally-owned onshore oil and gas resources, ensure that oil and gas producers “use all reasonable precautions to prevent waste of oil or gas developed....” Unfortunately, at present, BLM’s outdated, 34-year old waste policies do not effectively prevent waste, as evidenced by the Government Accountability Office’s 2010 Report, GAO-11-34, which found that through more robust action BLM could reduce wasteful flaring, leaking, and venting of natural gas by 40%. More recent studies have confirmed that substantial amounts of methane waste can quickly be eliminated at very low cost. Given technological trends, these estimates suggest a pathway towards “zero tolerance” for methane waste and pollution.

This pathway is particularly viable if BLM modernizes its waste policies by harnessing a potent combination of “front-end” planning and management tools with requirements mandating the use of proven, often-cost effective technologies and practices at the “back end” of oil and gas development. BLM’s use of its “front-end” planning and management tools also demonstrates how BLM action effectively coordinates with other regulatory action by, e.g., EPA, to drive the maximum amount of practical and feasible methane emission reductions.

These comments are designed to illuminate that pathway for BLM. As background, on January 27, 2014, the signatories to these comments provided BLM with a set of Core Principles. Those Core Principles are incorporated by reference. The undersigned organizations provide these additional comments to build upon our Core Principles and to respond to issues raised at BLM’s public forums hosted in Golden, Colorado; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Dickinson, North Dakota; and Washington, D.C. in the Spring of 2014.

We are optimistic that BLM will move forward expeditiously with its rulemaking to curb methane waste and pollution from the development of publicly owned oil and natural gas resources. To inform this process, we welcome the opportunity to discuss our recommendations in more detail.

Sincerely,



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