

GUEST OPINION

Guest opinion: U.S. wastes enough gas to heat 1M homes

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FILE - In this Feb. 25, 2015, file photo, a gas flare is seen at a natural gas processing facility near Williston, N.D.
The Associated Press

Do you like to hike and breathe in our fresh, clean mountain air? Do you like to fish in the clear mountain waters of Montana?

The health and environment of communities like Red Lodge will be jeopardized by the Trump administration's proposed repeal of the Bureau of

Land Management's common-sense 2016 Methane and Waste Prevention Rule. Repeal of this rule, which regulates the leaking, venting and flaring of methane from oil and gas wells on public lands, will have a devastating impact on communities such as mine, who depend upon the responsible use of our natural resources.

I know the importance of clean air to the residents of and visitors to mountain communities. I have been following the benefits that the implementation of Colorado's strong statewide methane safeguards have had at its local and state level. Montana and all Western states would benefit from similar national-level safeguards. Since Colorado's methane rule went into effect, leakage rates have been reduced by 75 percent. In fact, seven out of 10 oil and gas producers said that the benefits outweigh the costs, as they are able to sell methane that would have otherwise been wasted. Developers and communities intricately linked to public lands across the country could benefit from the implementation of the 2016 Methane Waste Rule. Why, then, is the administration ignoring American interests?

Oil and gas companies waste \$330 million worth of natural gas each year due to the unregulated leaking, venting, and flaring of methane from wells. This waste could heat over 1 million homes if captured and used. In addition, methane waste shortchanges taxpayers by millions of dollars because royalties aren't collected from oil and gas companies who are venting and flaring methane. The public is forced to unnecessarily bear the financial impact as well as endure the effects on our health and environment by this wasteful and dangerous practice.

In Red Lodge, we value our access to public lands and clean air. However, without current safeguards limiting methane emissions from oil and gas drilling in Montana and nearby Wyoming, the clean air we and our kids need to breathe is threatened. According to the 2017 State of the Rockies

Conservation In The West Poll, 81 percent of Westerners and specifically 84 percent of Montanans support requiring oil and gas companies operating on public lands to prevent leaks of methane gas and reduce the need to burn off excess natural gas.

The administration's actions to repeal the methane waste rule not only ignores the public's overwhelming support for safeguards limiting methane waste, it also flies in the face of common-sense natural resource and public lands management.

According to BLM's own analysis, the latest proposal to replace the 2016 rule would actually reduce natural gas supply from federal lands and would cost Americans more than \$1 billion dollars in wasted natural gas and pollution. This is simply unacceptable. The residents of and visitors to Red Lodge and other western communities deserve to have clean air to breathe and to receive their fair share of royalties from captured methane. Please listen to Americans and implement the 2016 Methane Waste Prevention Rule; don't remove critical methane emission safeguards.

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