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## **Opinion: We need a federal rule that applies to all oil and gas development on public lands**

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**Sarah Smith Hymes**

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The town of Avon is nestled in the beautiful Vail Valley, nestled between the Holy Cross Wilderness and the rugged, remote Gore Mountain Range.

This valley is home to over 50,000 people and draws visitors from around the globe to experience world-class skiing opportunities, as well as hiking, biking, fishing and camping.

Our community, along with many other mountain communities nationally and internationally, is experiencing the impacts of climate change at an accelerated rate.

Warmer temperatures alter precipitation patterns and lead to shorter ski seasons, which can reduce summer water availability and recreation. Variable runoff and increased temperatures also contribute to a longer fire season, further impacting recreation opportunities and general quality of life.

Experiencing the impacts of climate change first-hand have led Avon residents to support common-sense regulations that ensure the health of our communities and preservation of resources critical to our economy and environment.

The 2016 Bureau of Land Management Methane Waste Prevention Rule did just that — it required oil and gas companies operating on public lands to prevent and

capture — via easily implementable technologies — leaking, venting and flaring methane natural gas emissions.

These federal regulations not only protected the resources of mountain communities like Avon, but better ensured clean air and a fair return for taxpayers across the country.

However, in September, as part of the Trump Administration's continued efforts to reduce "regulatory burdens" and encourage "energy dominance," the Department of Interior finalized the rollback of the 2016 Bureau of Land Management Methane Prevention Rule.

This action reversed commonsense pollution prevention measures supported by over half a million Americans and takes the country back to a patchwork of inconsistent state-level regulations.

In eliminating the 2016 rule, which would have reduced emissions by 35 percent, the administration continues to disregard the severe economic, environmental and health impacts that unregulated methane emissions pose to the American people.

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas that has an impact 100 times greater than that of carbon dioxide. Although methane dissipates more quickly than carbon dioxide, it is still traps 25 times more energy than carbon dioxide after 100 years in the atmosphere.

So, although natural gas burns cleaner than coal or oil, the leaking, venting, and flaring of methane during the production and delivery process of natural gas extraction counteracts this benefit.

To make matters worse, without the 2016 rule in place, oil and gas companies drilling on public lands will waste \$330 million worth of taxpayer-owned natural gas each year.

To address issues around lost revenue, as well as to reduce the impacts from methane emissions to air quality and public health, Colorado became the first state to implement its own methane rule in 2014, requiring producers to more regularly check for and fix leaks.

A new report shows that Colorado is leading the nation in methane reduction, with leakage rates reduced by at least half, while continuing to have a thriving oil and gas economy, with natural gas production increased about 10 percent, oil production up 58 percent, and the number of oil and gas wells increased by more than 3 percent since 2014.

What's more, seven out of 10 producers said the benefits outweighed the costs, particularly since methane that wasn't leaked could be sold. Yet, there is still room for improvement.

Colorado still ranks fifth in the nation in total gas wasted from public lands. Full implementation of the Bureau of Land Management's 2016 rule would have resolved a number of issues that current state regulations fail to address, costing Colorado taxpayers roughly \$14 million in lost revenues. Further, as we know, air quality issues extend far beyond state boundaries.

We need a comprehensive federal rule that applies to all oil and gas development on public lands in order to minimize waste and reduce methane emissions.

Energy dominance should not win out over public health and economic well-being of mountain communities such as ours.

*Sarah Smith Hymes, mayor of Avon, Colorado, represents over 6,400 year-round residents, 3,500 second home owners, and 500,000 annual visitors to the Town of Avon and neighboring Beaver Creek Ski area.*