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PRESS RELEASE

**BLM's Finalized Methane Rule Limits Waste of Natural Resources and Pollution in Western Communities**

*Strong enforcement of BLM and EPA rules are now needed to protect communities from the harmful pollutants generated by oil and gas extraction on federal and tribal lands.*

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) [finalized a rule](#) to address methane waste from oil and gas development. While the rule is a good start at limiting the uncontrolled waste of methane on federal and tribal lands, the BLM needs to do more to protect our public lands and minerals, taxpayer and tribal interests, and Western communities.

The finalized BLM rule, which focuses on royalties, falls short in adequately addressing the massive volume of waste and pollution associated with methane. **Dr. Barbara Vasquez, Chair of WORC's Oil & Gas Team and a member of Western Colorado Alliance explains,** "Encouraging companies to commit to capturing all methane, and assessing royalties on wasted methane is a long-overdue step in the right direction. However, it's a disappointingly narrow interpretation of BLM's fundamental responsibility under the Mineral Leasing Act to prevent waste of the resources extracted from public and tribal lands and minerals. This minimal approach still allows the waste of taxpayer-owned resources and the continuation of serious air pollution that harms the health of our communities. Fortunately, the EPA's strong new clean air standards will help to protect our western communities from continued pollution by methane and associated VOC's and other harmful air pollutants. Our members will continue to push BLM and all regulatory agencies to stop this unnecessary pollution and waste entirely."

The finalized rule will reduce routine venting and flaring by requiring operators to either commit to a zero flaring certification or file a waste minimization plan for new and existing wells. Although this is a step in the right direction, the final rule will allow companies to continue venting and flaring practices that ultimately harm surrounding communities and the environment, and waste a publicly owned resource.

According to analysis by the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), approximately 88 billion cubic feet of methane, worth around \$230 million, was vented or flared on federal and tribal lands in 2019. This amount of gas could have met the yearly needs of 1.2 million households, surpassing the combined households of New Mexico and North Dakota.

Western states and communities suffer from lost revenue due to methane waste on public lands. Since 49% of royalties collected from federal public lands are returned to the states, this loss of revenue from continued venting and flaring reduces funding for mitigation efforts, infrastructure development, education, and services for communities directly impacted by energy development. Additionally, states miss out on additional revenue from the associated severance and conservation taxes.

The impact of wasted methane extends beyond economic concerns. Tribal communities in North Dakota are particularly affected by methane waste, suffering not just from economic harm but [disproportionate health impacts](#) from venting and flaring. **Representative Lisa Finley-DeVile (ND4a) co-founder and VP of Fort Berthold POWER, and Dakota Resource Council board member said**, “The BLM waste rule addresses the royalties lost from unfettered oil and gas production, but for my community on Fort Berthold Reservation, the fact that routine venting and flaring from existing and new wells is not banned means the continued waste of tribal resources. Not only do we lose out on revenue through royalties and taxes but we also have to pay the higher costs of healthcare due to exposure to the wasted gas.”

[Studies](#) have shown that an increase in flared methane as small as 1% leads to a percentage increase in hospitalization rates almost as large (0.73%), disproportionately affecting communities of color. [Native Americans](#) also live near oil and gas wells at rates significantly higher than the national average, putting them at greater risk from pollution associated with methane emissions.

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*[The Western Organization of Resource Councils \(WORC\)](#) is a network of nine grassroots organizations in seven Western states with 19,935 members, many of them ranchers and farmers committed to common-sense reform in agriculture, oil and gas development, coal mine reclamation, and rural economic development. Headquartered in Billings, Mont., WORC also has an office in Washington, D.C.*

*[Western Colorado Alliance](#) is a community group of over 2,000 members and supporters that works with residents across rural Western Colorado to build a future where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just, and self-reliant. The Alliance brings people together to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development to address issues such as climate change, oil and gas impacts, public lands management, access to clean energy, and sustainable agriculture.*

*[Dakota Resource Council's](#) mission is to promote sustainable use of North Dakota's natural resources and family-owned and operated agriculture by building member-led local groups that empower people to influence the decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities.*