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BLM's Waste Prevention Rule is critical to Fort Berthold's future

By Lisa DeVille

For those of us who live on the Fort Berthold Reservation and experience intimately what it's like to have industrial-scale oil and gas development in our midst, the Bureau of Land Management's 2016 Methane Waste Prevention Rule was a welcome step in the right direction.

The rule was the product of more than two years of public outreach that generated more than 300,000 comments. It was the first time in 30 years that BLM updated its standards to limit waste of publicly-owned natural gas. As part of that update, BLM embraced new technologies to cost-effectively detect leaks that otherwise waste billions of cubic feet of natural gas every year.

It also confronted the appalling waste of the public's resources and the considerable lost revenues resulting from the flaring and venting of natural gas from sloppy, outdated production practices.

My tribe, individual Indian mineral owners like my family, as well as states and the federal government lose money because of the flagrant wasting of natural gas. One study estimates that taxpayers could lose up to \$800 million over the next decade as a result of waste. BLM's rule targets that waste.

As a result, the effects on the Fort Berthold Reservation will be particularly egregious if the Waste Prevention Rule is put on hold or rescinded.

Revenues from the sale of captured natural gas are critically important for my tribe. They support schools, health care, public services, infrastructure improvements and roads, many of which have been crumbling under the stress of the heavy equipment used in drilling operations.

With more than 1,500 active oil and gas wells on the reservation and thousands more planned, the need to maximize revenues is obvious to everyone who lives at Fort Berthold.

But the industry has been cavalier in its wasteful exploitation of the public's oil and gas resources.

Because of a long history of broken treaties, much of the mineral wealth beneath Fort Berthold is privately owned. That makes the minerals we have held on to even more important. But about 50 percent of natural gas owned by my Tribe and allotted to individual tribal members was flared—in other words, wasted. By contrast, the state average for flaring is 32 percent; the national average is 2 percent.

Just as bad as the waste is the awful sound of the flares, which roar like jet engines, and the sight of them as they light up the formerly dark and quiet prairie all through the night.

Often flaring is explained away as the unavoidable consequence of developing gas in regions far from pipelines, but more than 57 percent of the gas flared at Fort Berthold was from wells that were connected to a pipeline.

Beyond the loss of revenue, at Fort Berthold, members of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation like me, my children, and grandchildren are left to breathe air contaminated with hazardous air pollutants that can cause headaches, asthma, neurological damage, cancer and other life-threatening conditions.

Our quality of life is diminished by the rotten-egg smell of the polluted air, the constant roar from the gas flares, the light pollution that obliterates the night sky, and the rumbling of the earth beneath our homes from the drilling operations.

In our culture, we are taught that we are created from the Earth. The Earth is our mother, so we must protect her.

As a student of environmental science, I know that methane is the second-largest contributor to human-caused climate change, and it's global-warming potential is 86 times that of carbon dioxide.

The devastating impacts on our planet are an affront to our culture, and deny our children and grandchildren the opportunity to experience the cherished relationship with the vibrant, nurturing Earth and her exquisite beauty.

The 30-day period for public comments on the administration's plan to suspend the rule ends on Monday, November 6. We need to demand that these reasonable protections for our people and our planet remain in place.

Send your comments to BLM today, and tell BLM not to put these critical protections on hold.

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