

May 26, 2017

The Honorable Senator Tom Udall  
531 Hart Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Ben Ray Lujan  
2231 Rayburn HOB  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Martin Heinrich  
303 Hart Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham  
214 Cannon House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Senators Udall and Heinrich and Representatives Lujan and Lujan Grisham,

Thank you for your extraordinary leadership in defending the rule adopted by the Bureau of Land Management last year to prevent the waste of methane produced on public lands. Your success preserves BLM's authority and responsibility to prevent methane waste and to safeguard our lands and communities. New Mexicans and all Americans won on May 10th when an attempt to eliminate the rule, supported by President Trump and Governor Susana Martinez, lost by a vote of 51-49.

With your help over the past several years, the BLM adopted a rule that is worth fighting for. You were there from the beginning, sending a letter to the White House calling on President Obama to tackle oil and gas methane pollution. After years of work, the rule we won requires companies producing oil and gas on public lands to stop waste from venting, flaring, and leaking methane. It requires companies to take reasonable steps to reduce this waste, and while some oil and gas producers have acted responsibly, many more have not, as evidenced by the methane "hot spot" plaguing northwestern New Mexico and the widespread flaring visible at night from space on the New Mexico side of the Permian Basin.

There are real economic gains to be had from the rule. It is estimated that \$100 million worth of natural gas is lost in New Mexico each year on public and tribal lands (methane is the major constituent of natural gas). This is enough natural gas to heat all of the homes in Albuquerque, Las Cruces and Santa Fe combined. This waste cost the state millions more in royalty payments which could have been used to help close the state's budget shortfall and provide funding for state, tribes, and communities to support schools, infrastructure projects, and public services. The rule also sets the stage for a surge in oilfield service jobs and business focused on controlling methane emissions, with workers needed to find and fix leaks, replace old equipment, and build new infrastructure.

We want to also thank you for taking the time to meet with so many New Mexicans concerned about the problems caused by methane waste: waste of energy resources, lost state and local revenues, threats to clean air and water, public health, and climate change, failure to keep faith-based commitments to our planet, and threats to quality outdoor recreation such as hunting and fishing. There was overwhelming support for the rule at public hearings held in Albuquerque and Farmington, and 74% of New Mexicans supported the rule in a Colorado College “Conservation in the West poll. We are grateful that you heard our voices.

The rule gives all New Mexicans a powerful tool to push BLM and oil and gas companies to clean up their operations and conduct drilling and pipeline construction more responsibly. We are confident that it will deliver on its promises: reduced waste, more public revenues, reduced hazards to public health such as asthma-causing ozone and carcinogens, reduced climate pollution, less haphazard development scarring the landscape, and mitigation of the methane hot spot. The rule also empowers citizens to push the BLM Farmington and Carlsbad Field Offices to adopt strong methane pollution controls as they revise their once-in-a-generation Resource Management Plans, now underway.

Looking ahead, we know our work isn’t over. We must defend the rule against a current challenge in federal court, and we are pleased that the New Mexico Attorney General has intervened in this fight to defend the rule. We must also oppose every attempt by the Trump administration to rescind or weaken the rule through a new rule-making process. Meanwhile, we hope to see New Mexico develop strong state-level methane pollution rules to fill gaps in the federal rule.

We thank you for the victory we have won, and look forward to working with you on battles to come.

Sincerely,

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Environmental Defense Fund

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Executive Director  
Western Environmental Law Center

Jennifer Brandt  
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