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## Activists: Keep methane-flaring rule in place

### BLM's policy aims to reduce waste of natural gas

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Burning or venting the natural gas from oil and gas production is tantamount to burning taxpayer dollars.

That was the message from a tax day rally Tuesday to call on Sen. Cory Gardner to defend a Bureau of Land Management rule established in November to reduce natural gas waste from venting, flaring, and leaks during oil and natural gas production on federal and tribal land.

A roll-back of the rule passed the U.S. House and currently is being debated in the U.S. Senate, and the approximately dozen people who attended the rally at the corner of Fourth Street and White Avenue cited multiple reasons for wanting the rule kept in place, including the financial boon to taxpayers and improved air quality.

"A lot of oil and gas companies are doing the right thing, but some need to be encouraged to capture and reuse (natural gas)," said Grand Junction City Councilman Bennett Boeschstein.

The rule states that the BLM "believes there are economical, cost-effective, and reasonable measures that operators can take to minimize gas waste. These measures will enhance our nation's natural gas supplies, boost royalty receipts for American taxpayers, tribes, and

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States, reduce environmental damage from venting, flaring, and leaks of gas, and ensure the safe and responsible development of oil and gas resources."

Chris Muhr, owner of All Metals Welding & Fabrication Co., compared the rule to his own business, at which he said all waste is recycled and added "I'd be a pretty bad business owner if I didn't do that."

"If (the government wastes) their product, they can't afford to keep employees, they can't afford benefits, there are a lot of negative effects," Muhr said.

In fiscal year 2015, domestic production from 96,000 federal onshore oil and gas wells represented 11 percent of the country's natural gas supply and 5 percent of its oil, according to the Office of Natural Resources Revenue.

That totaled 183.4 million barrels of oil, 2.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 3.3 billion gallons of natural gas liquids from onshore federal and tribal oil and gas leases. The production value of that oil and gas exceeded \$20.9 billion and generated more than \$2.3 billion in royalties, which were shared be-

tween the states, tribes and Indian allottee owners, according to the ONRR.

However, the BLM reported that even with improved technology in oil and gas production, "the American public has not benefited from the full potential of this increased production, due to venting, flaring, and leaks of significant quantities of gas during the production process."

According to the ONRR, federal and tribal onshore lessees and operators reported that they vented or flared 462 billion cubic feet of natural gas between 2009 and 2015, which is enough gas to serve about 6.2 million households for a year, assuming 2009 usage levels.

Mary McCutchan, a member of Great Old Broads for Wilderness who attended Tuesday's rally, said the BLM rule not only is good for taxpayers, but ensures "clean air and better breathing. To me it's win-win," she said.

Boeschstein said that while Colorado has strong laws relating to capturing and recycling natural gas, they mean less if surrounding states don't also have similar laws.

Emily Hornback, a community organizer with the Western Colorado Congress, called the BLM rule necessary, "and that's why we're out here calling on Senator Cory Gardner to keep this common-sense rule in place."



DEAN HUMPHREY/The Daily Sentinel

Members of the Western Colorado Congress organized a protest in front of the post office downtown Tuesday in an effort to retain the recently enacted rule by the Bureau of Land Management to cut down on flaring and venting of natural gas.