

BLM proposes rules for oil, methane emissions

By Jonathan Thompson, High Country News

On Jan. 22, as “Snowzilla” was about to hit Washington, D.C., and much of the East Coast, Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell announced much-anticipated rules on emissions from oil and gas production on Bureau of Land Management-administered leases. While the rules resemble those proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency last year, these are likely to have a bigger impact in the oil and gas fields of the West.

The EPA rules only affect new and modified facilities, while the BLM regulations also apply to the tens of thousands of existing oil and gas production facilities.

It may seem odd that a land management agency is regulating pollution. Technically, though, the rules are not aimed at reducing emissions, but at stopping the waste of natural gas, which clearly falls under the BLM’s mandate. Since natural gas is mostly methane, a particularly potent greenhouse gas, with health-damaging and ozone-producing volatile organic compounds mixed in, conserving the commodity also reduces pollution.

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