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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Drilling the Climate: New Mexico Oil and Gas Auction to Fuel Global Warming** *BLM ignoring its responsibility to protect New Mexico's climate*

*Santa Fe, NM*—Despite the growing danger posed by climate change to New Mexico, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management is ignoring the natural gas industry's significant contributions to global warming pollution as it feverishly promotes a runaway drilling boom.

Sloppy industrial practices make oil and gas drilling the second-largest source of greenhouse gas pollution in New Mexico, but tomorrow, April 16<sup>th</sup>, the Bureau of Land management intends to open up another 100,000 acres of the state to the oil and gas industry without considering the impacts of climate change and without requiring the use of the latest technologies to cut global warming pollution.

Climate change is a major threat to New Mexico. A 2005 report by the State shows climate shifts driven by fossil fuel pollution will lead to prolonged heat waves, deeper droughts, public health risks and more air pollution. Governor Richardson has exercised game-changing leadership on this issue, calling for a 75% reduction in global warming pollution from 2000 levels by 2050 to protect New Mexico. Last year, New Mexico became the first state in the nation to require the oil and gas industry to track and disclose their emissions of climate-changing pollution.

“Will New Mexico still be the Land of Enchantment without cool water, clean air, and outdoor recreation?” asked Rachel Conn with Amigos Bravos. “Climate change threatens everything that makes New Mexico special. We need to take action today for the future of our state.”

While the natural gas industry promotes its product as a “cleaner-burning fuel,” the greenhouse impact of natural gas, also known as methane, is 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide. In New Mexico, accidental leaks and deliberate releases inject more than 20 million tons of methane and carbon dioxide into the air every year. Most of this pollution comes from natural gas drilling in northwestern New Mexico, which is one of the largest gas-producing regions in the United States.

Local, regional, and national citizens groups have combined efforts and called on the Bureau of Land Management to think twice about the lease auction. In a formal protest, the groups have challenged the agency to adopt climate safeguards as conditions for drilling, many of which could help industry make money. Although the oil and gas lease auction is tomorrow, the Bureau of Land Management has yet to respond.

“We need to look before we leap,” said Jeremy Nichols, Director of Rocky Mountain Clean Air Action, one of the groups joining the protest. “The Bureau of Land Management can ill afford to keep drilling away the climate, especially when profitable strategies to cut global warming pollution are at hand.”

The Bureau of Land Management’s failure to address climate change defies several bedrock federal environmental laws, as well as an order issued by the Secretary of the Interior in 2001. This order requires Interior agencies to consider the impacts of climate change in their decisions. While other agencies are following the order, the Bureau of Land Management has so far turned a blind eye to its responsibilities. An August 2007 report by the Government Accountability Office criticized the agency for not developing any guidance for implementing the order.

In addition to the damage caused by sloppy operations, methane vented to the atmosphere represents a real and costly form of waste. In Governor Richardson’s 2006 Executive Order calling for a 20% reduction in global warming pollution from gas drilling operations, his administration estimated that \$360 million in gas simply disappears into thin air every year.

In fact, methane capture technologies are available and affordable. Current technologies can reduce methane emissions by 95% or more. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has identified more than 80 ways the oil and gas industry can reduce methane emissions, save money, and help protect the climate. Some of these are as simple and direct as maintaining oil and gas facilities to reduce methane from leaking valves and equipment.

“This isn’t about whether oil and gas drilling is good or bad, it’s about whether the Bureau of Land Management is going to safeguard our climate and New Mexico’s heritage,” said Erik Schlenker-Goodrich with the Western Environmental Law Center. “With win-win solutions at our fingertips, there’s no reason the agency should be leasing away oil and gas without first adopting climate safeguards. This is a no-brainer.”

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The groups’ protest to the Bureau of Land Management’s lease sale auction is available online at [http://ourcleanair.org/uploads/GHGO\\_G\\_NMprotest\\_3-1.31.2008.pdf](http://ourcleanair.org/uploads/GHGO_G_NMprotest_3-1.31.2008.pdf).

Notice of the Bureau of Land Management’s April 16, 2008 lease sale auction is online at [http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/nm/programs/0/og\\_sale\\_notices\\_and/2008.Par.48580.File.dat/April162008\\_SaleNotice.pdf](http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/nm/programs/0/og_sale_notices_and/2008.Par.48580.File.dat/April162008_SaleNotice.pdf).