



Conservationists appeal dismissal of lease dispute

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HELENA, Mont. — Three conservation groups filed notice Thursday they will appeal a federal judge's dismissal of their lawsuit seeking to force companies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions when drilling nearly 80,000 acres of oil and gas leases scattered across Montana.

The Montana Environmental Information Center, WildEarth Guardians and Earthworks' Oil and Gas Accountability Project want the Bureau of Land Management to require companies to cut methane emissions as a condition of their leases.

Methane is considered a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. It's emitted through leaking pipelines.

U.S. District Judge Sam Haddon rejected the lawsuit in June, ruling the emissions from drilling the 120 leases would not raise global greenhouse gases to a point that would hurt the groups' "recreational and aesthetic interests" in nearby lands.

The three groups filed a notice of appeal with the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. In a statement released after the filing, Western Environmental Law Center Executive Director Erik Schlenker-Goodrich said all emission sources appear small in isolation.

"But these leases are the building block of a massive federal oil and gas program totaling roughly 38 million acres of leased lands across the U.S. and a perfect opportunity for action preventing natural gas waste and methane pollution," he said.

The lawsuit would ensure the BLM is doing its part to stop natural gas waste and methane pollution, said Montana Environmental Information Center Executive Director Jim Jensen.

Industry groups, including the American Petroleum Institute and Western Energy Alliance, intervened in the case on the side of the government. They defended the BLM's review of the leases, saying the agency determined there would be no significant environmental impact from oil and gas production on the leased land.