February 5, 2020

To: Alaska State Office, Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior

Subject: Comments on Failure to Monetize Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska: Draft Integrated Activity Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (DOI-BLM-AK-R000-2019-0001-EIS)

Submitted by: Environmental Defense Fund, Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University School of Law, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Union of Concerned Scientists, The Wilderness Society, Western Environmental Law Center, WildEarth Guardians[1]

The following comments focus on the failure of the Bureau of Land Management ("BLM") to monetize climate damages in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska draft integrated activity plan and environmental impact statement ("DEIS").[2] BLM forecasts that the highest emitting alternative of the plan could produce as much as 76.87 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions in a given year during peak production[3]—an enormous amount that will contribute to numerous adverse climate impacts including sea-level rise, greater incidence of coastal storms and extreme weather events, and human health impacts and mortality from heat-related illnesses. While the National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA") requires BLM to disclose and assess the potentially significant impacts of the development plan's emissions in an environmental impacts statement—and an available metric, the social cost of greenhouse gases, allows the agency to do precisely that—BLM only provides volumetric emissions totals and thus fails to disclose any of the potentially significant impacts (including real-world climate damages such as sea-level rise, property damage, human health impacts, and so forth) that those substantial emissions will produce.

In the DEIS, BLM reuses flawed arguments to circumvent its responsibility to monetize damages from the greenhouse gas emissions that would certainly be a result of the plan's approval. First, BLM misleadingly states that the social cost of greenhouse gases was designed for rulemakings and therefore is not applicable to NEPA analysis.[4] Second, BLM implies that because NEPA does not require cost-benefit analysis, the agency is not required to provide a monetary value for the plan's climate impacts.[5] Third, BLM claims that the social cost of greenhouse gases protocol does not

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[1] Our organizations may separately and independently submit other comments on other issues raised by CEQ's Draft Guidance.

[2] U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska: Integrated Activity Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, Nov. 2019 [hereinafter "DEIS"].

[3] *See id*. at tbls. 3-1, G-16G-17 (combined annual operational and downstream emissions for Alternative D high-development scenario.).; Note that tables G-18 and G-19 are labeled as showing emissions in thousand metric tons per year, while table 3-1 makes it seem that these must be cumulative emissions rather than annual.

[4] *Id* at G-9.

[5] *Id*.

measure the "actual incremental impacts of a project,"[6] and is therefore not a useful tool for decisionmakers.[7] However, all of this is untrue; through these arguments BLM obfuscates the appropriateness and usefulness of monetizing the plan's potentially significant climate impacts with the social cost of greenhouse gases metric. The social cost of greenhouse gases metric that was designed by a federal Interagency Working Group ("IWG") would allow BLM to contextualize the plan's potentially significant climate impacts as NEPA requires. BLM should use that metric to monetize the damages that will result from this integrated activity plan. And if the agency does not provide additional information to contextualize the plan's emissions, it will violate its obligations under NEPA.

These comments make the following points:

1. NEPA requires a "reasonably thorough discussion" and "necessary contextual information" on potentially significant climate impacts, which the social cost of greenhouse gases helps provide;
2. NEPA requires agencies to assess and disclose the potentially significant impacts of emissions in an environmental impact statement, yet BLM fails to truly assess the magnitude of climate impacts in the DEIS. The social cost of greenhouse gases metric is designed to measure marginal additional damages and is therefore an appropriate and available tool to assess and disclose the potentially significant impacts of the emissions from a plan like this one. Monetizing climate damages will directly contextualize the potentially significant impacts of emissions in the DEIS;
3. BLM monetized a number of other effects of the draft integrated activity plan, including tax revenue and royalties, and must give potentially significant climate effects the same consideration. When an agency monetizes a proposed action's expected benefits—as BLM does here—the expected climate costs must be treated with proportional rigor. Additionally, the fact that not every effect can be monetized does not mean that monetization is not a useful analytical tool;

We explain each of these points in turn below.

I. BLM Impermissibly Fails to Disclose the Plan's Potentially Significant Climate Impacts Despite the Presence of a Simple and Readily-Available Tool for Doing So: The IWG's Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases

A. BLM Must Monetize the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases in the DEIS

NEPA, the statute under which environmental impact statements are required, directs agencies to fully and accurately analyze and disclose the potentially significant environmental, public health, and social welfare impacts of the proposed alternatives, and to contextualize that information for decision-makers and the public, in an environmental impact statement. NEPA requires a more searching analysis than merely disclosing the amount of pollution. Rather, BLM must examine the "ecological[,]… economic, [and] social" impacts of those emissions, including an assessment of their "significance."[8] By failing to use available tools, such as the social cost of carbon, to analyze and disclose the potentially significant impacts of the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the master development plan, BLM has violated NEPA.

[6] *Id.* at G-10.
[7] *Id.*
[8] 40 C.F.R. §§ 1508.8(b), 1502.16(a)–(b).

Monetizing Climate Damages Helps Fulfill the Obligations and Goals of NEPA

When a project has climate consequences that must be assessed under NEPA, monetizing the climate damages helps fulfill an agency's legal obligations under NEPA in ways that simple quantification of tons of greenhouse gas emissions cannot. NEPA requires "hard look" consideration of the potentially significant effects of each alternative option for major federal government actions. The U.S. Supreme Court has called the disclosure of impacts the "key requirement of NEPA," and held that agencies must "consider and disclose the *actual environmental effects*" of a proposed project in a way that "brings those effects to bear on [the agency's] decisions."[9] Courts have repeatedly concluded that an environmental impact statement must disclose potentially significant climate effects.[10] NEPA requires "a reasonably thorough discussion of the significant aspects of the probable environmental consequences," to "foster[] both informed decision-making and informed public participation."[11] In particular, "[t]he impact of greenhouse gas emissions on climate change is precisely the kind of cumulative impacts analysis that NEPA requires," and it is arbitrary to fail to "provide the necessary contextual information about the cumulative and incremental environmental impacts."[12]

Furthermore, the analyses included in environmental assessments and impact statements "cannot be misleading."[13] An agency must provide sufficient informational context to ensure that decisionmakers and the public will not misunderstand or overlook the magnitude of a proposed action's climate risks compared to the no action alternative. As this section explains, by only quantifying the volume of greenhouse gas emissions, agencies fail to assess and disclose the potentially significant climate consequences of an action and misleadingly present information in ways that will cause decisionmakers and the public to overlook important climate consequences. Using the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics to monetize climate damages helps fulfill NEPA's legal obligations in ways that quantification alone cannot.

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[9] *Baltimore Gas & Elec. Co. v. Natural Res. Def. Council*, 462 U.S. 87, 96 (1983) (emphasis added); *see also* 40 C.F.R. § 1508.8(b) (requiring assessment of the "ecological," "economic," "social," and "health" "*effects*") (emphasis added).

[10] As the Ninth Circuit has held: "[T]he fact that climate change is largely a global phenomenon that includes actions that are outside of [the agency's] control . . . does not release the agency from the duty of assessing the effects of *its* actions on global warming within the context of other actions that also affect global warming." *Ctr. for Biological Diversity v. Nat'l Highway Traffic Safety Admin.*, 538 F.3d 1172, 1217 (9th Cir. 2008); *see also Border Power Plant Working Grp. v. U.S. Dep't of Energy*, 260 F. Supp. 2d 997, 1028–29 (S.D. Cal. 2003) (failure to disclose project's indirect carbon dioxide emissions violates NEPA).

[11] *Ctr. for Biological Diversity*, 538 F.3d at 1194 (citations omitted).

[12] *Id.* at 1217.

[13] *High Country Conservation Advocates v. U.S. Forest Service*, 52 F. Supp. 3d 1174, 1182 (D. Colo. 2014); *accord Johnston v. Davis*, 698 F.2d 1088, 1094–95 (10th Cir. 1983) (disapproving of "misleading" statements resulting in "an unreasonable comparison of alternatives"); *Hughes River Watershed Conservancy v. Glickman*, 81 F.3d 437, 446 (4th Cir. 1996) ("For an EIS to serve these functions" of taking a hard look and allowing the public to play a role in decisionmaking, "it is essential that the EIS not be based on misleading economic assumptions"); *see also Sierra Club v. Sigler*, 695 F.2d 957, 979 (5th Cir. 1983) (holding that an agency's "skewed cost-benefit analysis" was "deficient under NEPA"); *see generally Bus. Roundtable v. SEC*, 647 F.3d 1144, 1148–49 (D.C. Cir. 2011) (criticizing an agency for "inconsistently and opportunistically fram[ing] the costs and benefits of the rule" and for "fail[ing] adequately to quantify the certain costs or to explain why those costs could not be quantified").

BLM Must Assess Potentially Significant Incremental Climate Impacts, Not Just the Volume of Emissions

The tons of greenhouse gases emitted by a project are not the "actual environmental effects" under NEPA. Rather, the potentially significant incremental climate impacts caused by those emissions must be analyzed and disclosed to the public, including:[14]

- property lost or damaged by sea-level rise, coastal storms, flooding, and other extreme weather events, as well as the costs of protecting vulnerable property and resettling following property losses;
- changes in energy demand, from temperature-related changes to the demand for cooling and heating;
- lost productivity and other impacts to agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, due to alterations in temperature, precipitation, CO_2 fertilization, and other climate effects;
- human health impacts, including cardiovascular and respiratory mortality from heat-related illnesses, changing disease vectors like malaria and dengue fever, increased diarrhea, and changes in associated pollution;
- changes in fresh water availability;
- ecosystem service impacts;
- impacts to outdoor recreation and other non-market amenities; and
- catastrophic impacts, including potentially rapid sea-level rise, damages at very high temperatures, or unknown events.[15]

Even in combination with a general, qualitative discussion of climate change, by calculating only the tons of greenhouse gases emitted, an agency fails to meaningfully assess and disclose the potentially significant incremental impacts to property, human health, productivity, and so forth.[16] An agency therefore falls short of its legal obligations and statutory objectives by disclosing only volume estimates. To take an analogous example, courts have held that just quantifying the acres of timber to

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[14] These impacts are all included to some degree in the three integrated assessment models (IAMs) used by the IWG (namely, the DICE, FUND, and PAGE models), though some impacts are modeled incompletely, and many other important damage categories are currently omitted from these IAMs. *Compare* Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Carbon, *Technical Support Document: Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis* at 6–8, 29–33 (2010), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/for-agencies/Social- Cost-of-Carbon-for-RIA.pdf [hereinafter 2010 TSD]; *with* Peter Howard, *Omitted Damages: What's Missing from the Social Cost of Carbon* (Cost of Carbon Project Report, 2014), http://costofcarbon.org/files/Omitted_Damages_Whats_Missing_From_the_Social_Cost_of_Carbon.pdf. For other lists of actual climate effects, including air quality mortality, extreme temperature mortality, lost labor productivity, harmful algal blooms, spread of West Nile virus, damage to roads and other infrastructure, effects on urban drainage, damage to coastal property, electricity demand and supply effects, water supply and quality effects, inland flooding, lost winter recreation, effects on agriculture and fish, lost ecosystem services from coral reefs, and wildfires, *see* EPA, *Multi-Model Framework for Quantitative Sectoral Impacts Analysis: A Technical Report for the Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017); U.S. Global Change Research Program, *Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017); EPA, *Climate Change in the United States: Benefits of Global Action* (2015); Union of Concerned Scientists, *Underwater: Rising Seas, Chronic Floods, and the Implications for U.S. Coastal Real Estate* (2018).

[15] For additional discussion of the climate impacts caused by greenhouse gas emissions, see Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5 °C: Summary for Policymakers* 9–12 (Valérie Masson-Delmotte et al. eds., 2018), *available at* https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2018/07/SR15_SPM_version_stand_alone_LR.pdf.

[16] *See High Country*, 52 F. Supp. 3d at 1190 ("Beyond quantifying the amount of emissions relative to state and national emissions and giving general discussion to the impacts of global climate change, [the agencies] did not discuss the impacts caused by these emissions."); *Mont. Envtl. Info. Ctr. v. U.S. Office of Surface Mining*, 274 F. Supp. 3d 1074, 1096–99 (D. Mont. 2017) (rejecting the argument that the agency "reasonably considered the impact of greenhouse gas emissions by quantifying the emissions which would be released if the [coal] mine expansion is approved, and comparing that amount to the net emissions of the United States").

be harvested or the miles of road to be constructed does not constitute a "description of *actual* environmental effects," even when paired with a qualitative "list of environmental concerns such as air quality, water quality, and endangered species," when the agency fails to assess "the degree that each factor will be impacted."[17]

By monetizing climate damages using the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics, BLM can help satisfy NEPA's legal obligations and statutory goals to assess and disclose potentially significant incremental effects bearing on the public interest. The social cost of greenhouse gases methodology calculates how the emission of an additional unit of greenhouse gases affects atmospheric greenhouse concentrations, how that change in atmospheric concentrations changes temperature, and how that change in temperature incrementally contributes to the above list of economic damages, including property damages, energy demand effects, lost agricultural productivity, human mortality and morbidity, lost ecosystem services and non-market amenities, and so forth.[18] The social cost of greenhouse gases tool therefore captures the factors that actually affect public welfare and assesses the degree of impact to each factor, in ways that just estimating the volume of emissions cannot.

Climate Damages Depend on Stock and Flow, But Volume Estimates Only Measure Flow

The climate damage generated by each additional ton of greenhouse gas emissions depends on the background concentration of greenhouse gases in the global atmosphere. Once emitted, greenhouse gases can linger in the atmosphere for centuries, building up the concentration of radiative-forcing pollution and affecting the climate in cumulative, non-linear ways.[19] As physical and economic systems become increasingly stressed by climate change, each marginal additional ton of emissions has a greater, non-linear impact. The climate damages generated by a given amount of greenhouse pollution is therefore a function not just of the pollution's total volume but also the year of emission, and with every passing year an additional ton of emissions inflicts greater damage.[20]

As a result, focusing just on the volume or rate of emissions, as BLM does here,[21] is insufficient to reveal the potentially significant incremental effect on the climate. The change in the rate of emissions (flow) must be assessed given the background concentration of emissions (stock). A percent comparison to national emissions is perhaps even more misleading. A project that adds 23 million additional tons per year of carbon dioxide would have contributed to 0.43% of total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions in the year 2012.[22] In the year 2014, that same project with the same carbon pollution would have contributed to just 0.41% of total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions—a seemingly smaller relative effect, since the total amount of U.S. emissions increased from 2012 to 2014.[23] However, because of rising background concentrations of global greenhouse gas stock, and because of growing stresses in physical and economic systems, the marginal climate damages per ton of carbon dioxide (as measured by the social cost of carbon) increased from $33 in 2012 to $35 in

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[17] *Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Ctr. v. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 387 F.3d 989, 995 (9th Cir. 2004) ("A calculation of the total number of acres to be harvested in the watershed is . . . not a sufficient description of the actual environmental effects that can be expected from logging those acres."); *see also Oregon Natural Res. Council v. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 470 F.3d 818 (9th Cir. 2006).

[18] 2010 TSD, *supra* note 14, at 5.

[19] Carbon dioxide also has cumulative effects on ocean acidification, in addition to cumulative radiative-forcing effects.

[20] *See* 2010 TSD, *supra* note 14, at 33 (explaining that the social cost of greenhouse gas estimates grow over time).

[21] *See, e.g.*, DEIS at Table 3.2.4.

[22] Total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions in 2012 were 5,366.7 million metric tons (for all greenhouse gases, emissions were 6,529 MMT CO2 eq). *See* EPA, *Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2016* at ES-6, tbl. ES-2 (2018).

[23] Total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions in 2014 were 5,568.8 million metric tons (and for all greenhouse gases, 6,763 MMT CO2 eq.). *Id.*

2014 (in 2007$).[24] Consequently, those 23 million additional tons would have caused marginal climate damages costing $759 million in the year 2012, but by 2014 that same 23 million tons would have caused $805 million in climate damages. To summarize: the percentage comparison to national emissions misleadingly implies that a project adding 23 million more tons of carbon dioxide would have a relatively less significant effect in 2014 than in 2012, whereas monetizing climate damages would accurately reveal that the emissions in 2014 were much more damaging than the emissions in 2012—almost $50 million more.

Capturing how marginal climate damages change as the background concentration changes is especially important because NEPA requires assessing both potentially significant present and future impacts.[25] Different project alternatives can have different greenhouse gas consequences over time. Most simply, different alternatives could have different start dates or other consequential changes in timing. Calculating volumes or percentages, especially on an average annual basis, is insufficient to accurately compare the climate damages of project alternatives with varying greenhouse gas emissions over time. Here, for instance, BLM reports only the total greenhouse gas emissions from each of the four alternatives, misleadingly implying a proportional relationship between these volumetric estimates and the climate impacts of each alternative.[26] By reporting only volumetric greenhouse gas projections, BLM paints an incomplete and misleading portrait of the relative climate impacts of the integrated activity plan.

This problem would be easily solved by applying the social cost of greenhouse gases metric, which seamlessly accounts for timing differences between different alternatives. By factoring in projections of the increasing global stock of greenhouse gases as well as increasing stresses to physical and economic systems, the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics enable accurate and transparent comparisons of projects with varying greenhouse gas emissions over time.

Monetization Provides the Required Informational Context that Volume Estimates Alone Lack

NEPA requires sufficient informational context. Yet the limited context that BLM provides for the plan's projected greenhouse gas emissions—namely, comparing such totals to largely irrelevant volumes of greenhouse gas emissions including the U.S. greenhouse gas inventory[27]—provides a confusing and inadequate picture that attempts to minimize the impacts of the plan's substantial emissions. Indeed, in a country of over 300 million people and over 6.5 billion tons of annual greenhouse gas emissions, it is far too easy to make highly significant effects appear relatively trivial.[28] For example, presenting all weather-related deaths as less than 0.1% of total U.S. deaths makes the risk of death by weather event sound trivial, but in fact that figure represents over 2,000

[24] Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, *Technical Support Document: Technical Update of the Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis* 25 tbl. A1 (2016) (calculating the central estimate at a 3% discount rate), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/scc_tsd_final_clean_8_26_16.pdf [hereinafter 2016 TSD].

[25] NEPA requires agencies to weigh the "relationship between local short-term uses of man's environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity," as well as "any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources." 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C).

[26] *See* DEIS at Table 3-1.

[27] *Id*. at 3-5–6.

[28] California CEQA guidance, Final Adopted Text for Revisions to the CEQA Guidelines § 15064.4, *available at* http://resources.ca.gov/ceqa/docs/2018_CEQA_FINAL_TEXT_122818.pdf. ("A project's incremental contribution may be cumulatively considerable even if it appears relatively small compared to statewide, national or global emissions.").

premature deaths per year[29]—hardly an insignificant figure.[30] As the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit recently observed, even a seemingly "very small portion" of a "gargantuan source of [harmful] pollution" may nevertheless "constitute[] a gargantuan source of [harmful] pollution on its own terms."[31] In other words, percentages can be misleading and can be manipulated by the choice of the denominator; what matters is the numerator's actual contribution to total harm.

For example, the presentation of the integrated activity plan's potential emissions in a given year of peak production under Alternative D as just 0.15% of the 2017 U.S. greenhouse gas inventory[32] makes a substantial and incredibly costly amount of emissions seem inconsequential. As described by Professor Cass Sunstein—drawing from the work of recent Nobel laureate economist Richard Thaler—a well-documented mental heuristic called "probability neglect" causes people to irrationally reduce such small probability risks entirely down to zero.[33] People have significant "difficulty understanding a host of numerical concepts, especially risks and probabilities."[34] By presenting large quantities of emissions—more than 76 million metric tons—as a tiny percentage representing less than 0.2% percent of a much larger total, the DEIS is likely to cause stakeholders to misunderstand the true significance of these emissions and treat them as meaningless. By comparison, through monetization it becomes clear that, for example, annual gross emissions from the project could cause about $4.38 billion in climate damages *in a given year* during peak production.[35]

Economic theory also explains why monetization is a much better tool than mere volume estimates to provide the necessary contextual information on climate damages. Abstract volume estimates fail to give people the required informational context due to another well-documented mental heuristic called "scope neglect." Scope neglect, as explained by Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, among others, causes people to ignore the size of a problem when estimating the value of addressing the problem. For example, in one often-cited study, subjects were unable to meaningfully distinguish between the value of saving 2,000 migratory birds from drowning in uncovered oil ponds, as compared to saving 20,000 birds.[36] As the Environmental Protection Agency's website explains,

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[29] *Compare* Nat'l Ctr. for Health Stat., Ctrs. for Disease Control & Prevention, *Death Attributed to Heat, Cold, and Other Weather Events in the United States, 2006-2010* at 1 (2014) (reporting about 2000 weather-related deaths per year) *with* Nat'l Ctr. for Health Stat., *Deaths and Mortality*, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm (reporting about 2.7 million U.S. deaths per year total).

[30] The public willingness to pay to avoid mortality is typically estimated at around $9.6 million (in 2016$). *See, e.g.*, 83 Fed. Reg. 12,086, 12,098 (Mar. 19, 2018) (U.S. Coast Guard rule using the Department of Transportation's value of statistical life in a recent analysis of safety regulations). Losing 2,000 lives prematurely to weather-related events is equivalent to a loss of public welfare worth over $19 billion per year.

[31] *Southwestern Elec. Power Co. v. EPA*, 920 F.3d 999, 1032 (5th Cir. 2019).

[32] DEIS at 3-6.

[33] Cass R. Sunstein, *Probability Neglect: Emotions, Worst Cases, and Law*, 112 Yale L. J. 61, 63, 72 (2002).

[34] Valerie Reyna & Charles Brainerd, *Numeracy, Ratio Bias, and Denominator Neglect in Judgments of Risk and Probability*, 18 Learning & Individual Differences 89 (2007).

[35] DEIS at Table 3-1 reports annual average gross greenhouse gas emissions under Alternative D as 76.8 million CO_2e using the IPPC's AR5 100-year GWP. The 2016 Interagency Working Group's central estimate of the social cost of carbon for year 2025 emissions is $46 in 2007$; adjusted for inflation using the CPI Inflation Calculator, that equals approximately $57 in 2019$. 76.87 million * $57 = $4.38billion. In a proper cost-benefit analysis, that calculation of costs from year 2025 emissions would be discounted back to present value.

[36] Daniel Kahneman et al., *Economic Preferences or Attitude Expressions? An Analysis of Dollar Responses to Public Issues*, 19 J. RISK & UNCERTAINTY 203, 212–13 (1999).

"abstract measurements" of so many tons of greenhouse gases can be rather inscrutable for the public, unless "translat[ed] . . . into concrete terms you can understand."[37]

By failing to contextualize greenhouse gas emissions in the DEIS, BLM potentially misleads the reader into believing that there would be no climate effects from the integrated activity plan, or that the effects would be extremely limited. As a result of scope neglect, for instance, many decisionmakers and members of the public may be unable to meaningfully contextualize the difference in the impact Alternative A, the no action alternative, which would produce as much as 44.57 million metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent each year during the peak production period, or Alternative C, which would produce as much as 56.1 million metric tons. While decisionmakers and the public can certainly tell this is a non-zero number, without any context it may be difficult to weigh the climate risks to which this volumetric estimate equates. In contrast, the plan's climate risks would be readily discernible through application of the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics. While the impact of releasing an additional 11.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent annually into the atmosphere may seem indiscernible, that impact is clearly conveyed by explaining that such a figure represents approximately $657 million per year in annual climate damages.[38]

In general, non-monetized effects are often irrationally treated as worthless.[39] On several occasions, courts have struck down administrative decisions for failing to give weight to non-monetized effects.[40] Most relevantly, in *Center for Biological Diversity v. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit found it arbitrary and capricious to give zero value "to the most significant benefit of more stringent [fuel-economy] standards: reduction in carbon emissions."[41] Monetizing climate damages provides the informational context required by NEPA, whereas a simple tally of emissions volume and a qualitative, generic description of climate change are misleading and fail to give the public and decisionmakers the required information about the magnitude of discrete climate effects.[42] Thus, while BLM treats "emissions . . . as a proxy for understanding the potential impacts [of the plan] on climate change" throughout the DEIS,[43] the social cost of greenhouse gases metrics in fact convey and contextualize the plan's potentially significant climate effects in ways that quantification alone cannot, and thus should be utilized to help satisfy the agency's obligations under NEPA.

Potentially Significant Climate Effects Must Be Monetized If Other Costs and Benefits Are Monetized

Though NEPA does not always require a full and formal cost-benefit analysis,[44] agencies' approaches to assessing costs and benefits must be balanced and reasonable. Courts have warned

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[37] EPA, *Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator*, *available at* https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator (last updated Dec. 2018) ("Did you ever wonder what reducing carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions by 1 million metric tons means in everyday terms? The greenhouse gas equivalencies calculator can help you understand just that, translating abstract measurements into concrete terms you can understand[.]").

[38] *See* supra note 35 for our calculation of this value.

[39] Richard Revesz, *Quantifying Regulatory Benefits*, 102 Cal. L. Rev. 1424, 1434–35, 1442 (2014).

[40] *See id.* at 1428, 1434.

[41] 538 F.3d at 1199.

[42] *See* 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(B) (requiring agencies to "identify and develop methods and procedures . . . which will insure that presently unquantified environmental amenities and values may be given appropriate consideration in decisionmaking along with economic and technical considerations").

[43] DEIS at G-11.

[44] 40 C.F.R. § 1502.23 ("[T]he weighing of the merits and drawbacks of the various alternatives need not be displayed in a monetary cost-benefit analysis."); *but see e.g.*, *Sierra Club v. Sigler*, 695 F.2d 957, 978–79 (5th Cir. 1983) (holding that NEPA "mandates at least a broad, informal cost-benefit analysis," and so agencies must "fully and accurately" and "objectively" assess

agencies, for example, that an agency cannot selectively monetize benefits in support of its decision while refusing to monetize the costs of its action.[45]

In *High Country Conservation Advocates v. Forest Service*, for instance, the U.S. District Court of Colorado found that it was "arbitrary and capricious to quantify the *benefits* of the lease modifications and then explain that a similar analysis of the *costs* was impossible when such an analysis was in fact possible."[46] The court explained that, to support a decision on coal mining activity, the agencies had "weighed several specific economic benefits—coal recovered, payroll, associated purchases of supplies and services, and royalties"—but arbitrarily failed to monetize climate costs using the readily available social cost of carbon protocol.[47] Similarly, in *Montana Environmental Information Center v. Office of Surface Mining* (*MEIC v. OSM*), the U.S. District Court of Montana followed the lead set by *High Country* and likewise held an environmental assessment to be arbitrary and capricious because it quantified the benefits of action (such as employment payroll, tax revenue, and royalties) while failing to use the social cost of carbon to quantify the costs.[48]

High Country and *MEIC v. OSM* were simply the latest applications of a broader line of case law in which courts find it arbitrary and capricious to apply inconsistent protocols for analyzing some effects compared to others, especially when the inconsistency obscures some of the most potentially significant effects.[49] For example, in *Center for Biological Diversity v. National Highway Traffic*

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environmental, economic, and technical costs); *Chelsea Neighborhood Ass'ns v. U.S. Postal Serv.*, 516 F.2d 378, 387 (2d Cir. 1975) ("NEPA, in effect, requires a broadly defined cost-benefit analysis of major federal activities."); *Calvert Cliffs' Coordinating Comm. v. U.S. Atomic Energy Comm'n*, 449 F.2d 1109, 1113 (D.C. Cir. 1971) ("NEPA mandates a rather finely tuned and 'systematic' balancing analysis" of "environmental costs" against "economic and technical benefits"); *Nat'l Wildlife Fed. v. Marsh*, 568 F. Supp. 985, 1000 (D.D.C. 1983) ("The cost-benefit analysis of NEPA is concerned primarily with environmental costs. . . . A court may examine the cost-benefit analysis only as it bears upon the function of insuring that the agency has examined the environmental consequences of a proposed project.").

[45] *High Country Conservation Advocates*, 52 F. Supp. 3d at 1191; *accord MEIC v. Office of Surface Mining*, 274 F. Supp. 3d at 1094–99 (holding it was arbitrary for the agency to quantify benefits in an EIS while failing to use the social cost of carbon to quantify costs, as well as arbitrary to imply there would be no effects from greenhouse gas emissions).

[46] 52 F. Supp. 3d at 1191.

[47] *Id.*

[48] 274 F. Supp. 3d at 1094–99 (also holding that it was arbitrary to imply that there would be zero effects from greenhouse gas emissions).

[49] Other cases from different courts that have declined to rule against failures to use the social cost of carbon in NEPA analyses are all distinguishable by the scale of the action or by whether other effects were quantified and monetized in the analysis. *See League of Wilderness Defenders v. Connaughton*, No. 3:12-cv-02271-HZ (D. Ore., Dec. 9, 2014*); EarthReports v. FERC*, 828 F.3d 949 (D.C. Cir. 2016); *WildEarth Guardians v. Jewell*, 1:16-CV-00605-RJ, at 23-24, (D.N.M. Feb. 16, 2017).

In *WildEarth Guardians v. Zinke*, while the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia stopped short of requiring BLM to use the social cost of carbon, it issued its holding on very narrow grounds. Specifically, the court declined to side with plaintiffs that "it was arbitrary and capricious for BLM to discuss the economic benefits of oil and gas drilling without quantifying their economic costs" by using the social cost of carbon protocol. 368 F. Supp.3d 41, 78 (D.D.C. Mar. 19, 2019). However, the court did *not* hold that BLM acted consistently in choosing to monetize benefits without monetizing costs; rather, it held that BLM's treatment of economic benefits was so "sparse[]" and "cursory" that the precedent established in *High Country Conservation Advocates v. Forest Service* could be differentiated. *Id*. But several important distinguishing arguments apply. First, the inconsistent treatment of costs and benefits is not the only reason why agencies should use the social cost of greenhouse gases to assess climate damages in NEPA reviews. The court never considered whether using the social cost of greenhouse gases was necessary or appropriate to help fulfill the obligations and goals of NEPA: to assess and disclose a project's potentially significant actual real-world impacts, to weigh the intensity and significance of a project's contributions to such impacts, and to give meaningful context to the information presented. Second, the court's consideration was incomplete on the issue of inconsistent treatment of costs and benefits. It is not clear why the paltry size of the lease's economic benefits should excuse BLM from inconsistently treating costs and failing to apply a readily available and easy-to-use tool to monetize the lease's hugely significant climate costs. *High Country*'s ruling turned not on the size of the monetized benefits but on the inconsistent treatment of costs and benefits. Furthermore, the court overlooked other portions of the original EAs and the tiered EISs that

Safety Administration, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that, because the agency had monetized other uncertain costs and benefits of its vehicle fuel efficiency standard—like traffic congestion and noise costs—its "decision not to monetize the benefit of carbon emissions reduction was arbitrary and capricious."[50] Specifically, it was arbitrary to "assign[] no value to *the most significant benefit* of more stringent [vehicle fuel efficiency] standards: reduction in carbon emissions."[51] When an agency bases a decision on cost-benefit analysis, it is arbitrary to "put a thumb on the scale by undervaluing the benefits and overvaluing the costs."[52] Similarly, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit has chastised agencies for "inconsistently and opportunistically fram[ing] the costs and benefits of the rule [and] fail[ing] adequately to quantify the certain costs or to explain why those costs could not be quantified";[53] and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit has remanded an environmental impact statement because "unrealistic" assumptions "misleading[ly]" skewed comparison of the project's positive and negative effects.[54]

The DEIS monetizes economic benefits similar to those highlighted in *High Country* and *MEIC*, including government revenues such as taxes and royalties.[55] BLM does not sufficiently justify this inconsistent approach to monetizing some potentially significant effects but not others, but tries to skirt the precedent set in the cases discussed above by labeling taxes and royalties as "economic impacts" rather than costs or benefits.[56] First, as explained in *MEIC v. OSM*, this is a semantical "distinction without a difference."[57] Indeed, NEPA regulations group all impacts—including economic, social, ecological, and public health—under the same category of "effects," and NEPA requires the agency to discuss all of these effects in as much detail as possible.[58] Whether a potentially significant effect is a cost, benefit, or transfer, if monetization is the best way to assess it and contextualize its precise impacts, then monetization is also the best way to comply with NEPA's obligations. Second, BLM uses the wellhead value, which reflects market price of the resource, to calculate possible royalties from each of the plan's alternatives. This effectively embeds the market price into the calculation of the action's economic "effects."[59] In a competitive market, like for coal, oil, and natural gas, the market price is typically thought to reflect aggregate willingness to pay based

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monetized and relied on larger economic benefits to much greater extent. The D.C. District Court also deferred to BLM's so-called "reasoned explanations," *id.*, yet failed to recognize that in *High Country*, the District of Colorado also considered and dismissed the post-hoc attempt to argue that the social cost of carbon protocol was too imprecise or controversial to use because of the range of estimates. 52 F. Supp. 3d 1174, 1192 (D. Colo. 2014). Finally, the court in *WildEarth v. Zinke* never discussed other important case law, such as *MEIC v. OSM*. Ultimately, the court instructed BLM on remand to "reassess" whether the social cost of greenhouse gas protocol would "contribute to informed decisionmaking" and ensure more accurate analysis as required by NEPA, 368 F. Supp.3d at 79 n.31. The court believed that "the protocol may one day soon be a necessary component of NEPA analyses," *id.*—and, indeed, that day has already arrived.

[50] 538 F.3d 1172, 1203 (9th Cir. 2008).

[51] *Id.* at 1199.

[52] *Id.* at 1198.

[53] *Bus. Roundtable v. SCC*, 647 F.3d 1144, 1148–49 (D.C. Cir. 2011).

[54] *Johnston v. Davis*, 698 F.2d 1088, 1094–95 (10th Cir. 1983)

[55] *See, e.g.*, DEIS at table W-11.

[56] *Id*. at G-9. ("Some people may perceive increased economic activity as a 'positive' impact that they desire to have occur whereas another person may view increased economic activity as negative or undesirable due to potential increase in local population, competition for jobs, and concerns that changes in population will change the quality of the local community.").

[57] 274 F. Supp. 3d. at 1096 n.9.

[58] 40 C.F.R. §1508.8.

[59] DEIS at 3-312 (explaining that federal royalties are calculated by applying 16.67 percent to "the wellhead value," a market-based valuation of the resource). Dividing the anticipated federal royalties of $150 million/year by this percentage (under Alternative D), DEIS at tbl. W-11, means that the market value of oil and gas production of the plan equals $900 million per year.

on social utility. Therefore, in calculating and reporting royalties, BLM has effectively presented a monetized estimate of the plan's projected social benefits.

As detailed further below, the IWG's approach presents a readily available tool to monetize the effects of greenhouse gas emissions based on peer-reviewed inputs and widely accepted assumptions. Agencies are every bit as capable of monetizing climate damages as they are of monetizing socioeconomic impacts. BLM therefore violates NEPA by monetizing potentially significant social and economic effects in the DEIS while refusing to monetize climate impacts.

B. The Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas Metric Is Appropriate for This Plan

Seemingly anticipating the objections presented above, BLM argues that it cannot monetize the integrated activity plan's effects on greenhouse gas emissions because "the [social cost of greenhouse gases] protocol does not measure the actual incremental impacts of a project on the environment."[60] BLM further argues that "the [social cost of greenhouse gases] dollar cost figure is generated in a range and provides little benefit in assisting the BLM Authorized Officer's decision for program or project-level analyses," and that "there are no current criteria or thresholds that determine a level of significance for social cost of carbon monetary values."[61] These statements, however, are simply incorrect: first, the social cost of greenhouse gas protocol is exactly such a tool to monetize the incremental climate impacts of specific projects or plans, and to contextualize the magnitude of those impacts. Second, BLM must exercise its expert judgment to determine if these monetary values are potentially significant after disclosing the necessary information.[62] NEPA requires BLM to use the best available science to support its NEPA analysis, and the social cost metrics remain the best estimates yet produced by the federal government for monetizing the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions and are "generally accepted in the scientific community."[63]

Monetization Is Appropriate and Useful in Any Decision with Potentially Significant Climate Impacts, Not Just Regulations

BLM argues that use of the IWG's social cost metrics is inappropriate for this plan because it "is not a rulemaking for which the [social cost of carbon] protocol was originally developed."[64] But this argument misses the point: BLM fails to explain why those metrics should not be used in environmental impact statements when they provide the best method to convey the potentially significant climate impacts of a plan that would contribute substantially to greenhouse gas emissions.

Indeed, there is nothing in the development of the social cost metrics that would limit applications to other contexts. The social cost of greenhouse gases measures the marginal cost of any additional unit of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere. The government action that precipitated that unit of emissions—a regulation, the granting of a permit, a project approval, or a master development plan—is irrelevant to the marginal climate damages caused by its emissions. Whether emitted by a leaking pipeline or the extraction process, because of a regulation or an integrated planning decision, or in Alaska or Maine, the marginal climate damages per unit of emissions remain the same. Indeed, the

[60] DEIS at G-10.
[61] DEIS at G-10.
[62] *See e.g.* Jayni Hein et al. *Pipeline Approvals and Greenhouse Gas Emissions* (Policy Integrity Report, Apr. 2019) at 40-41 on how agencies should use expert judgement to make such assessments.
[63] *See* 40 C.F.R. § 1502.22(b)(4).
[64] DEIS at G-9.

social cost of greenhouse gases has been used by many federal and state agencies in environmental impact reviews[65] and resource management decisions.[66]

The Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas Metrics Provide a Tool to Assess Potentially Significant Individual Physical Impacts

The social cost of greenhouse gas methodology is well suited to measure the marginal climate damages of individual projects. These protocols were developed to assess the cost of actions with marginal impacts on cumulative global emissions, and the metrics estimate the dollar figure of damages for one extra unit of greenhouse gas emissions. This marginal cost is calculated using integrated assessment models. These models translate emissions into changes in atmospheric greenhouse concentrations, atmospheric concentrations into changes in temperature, and changes in temperature into economic damages. A range of plausible socioeconomic and emissions trajectories are used to account for the scope of potential scenarios and circumstances that may actually result in the coming years and decades. The marginal cost is attained by first running the models using a baseline emissions trajectory, and then running the same models again with one additional unit of emissions. The difference in damages between the two runs is the marginal cost of one additional unit. The approach assumes that the marginal damages from increased emissions will remain constant for small emissions increases relative to gross global emissions. In other words, the monetization tools are in fact perfectly suited to measuring the marginal effects of individual projects or other discrete agency actions.

Some of the potentially significant incremental impacts on the environment that the social cost of greenhouse gas protocol captures—and which the DEIS fails to meaningfully analyze—include property lost or damaged; impacts to agriculture, forestry, and fisheries; impacts to human health; changes in fresh water availability; ecosystem service impacts; impacts to outdoor recreation and other non-market amenities; and some catastrophic impacts, including potentially rapid sea-level rise, damages at very high temperatures, or unknown events.[67] A key advantage of using the social cost of

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[65] For example, in August 2017, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management called the social cost of carbon "a useful measure to assess the benefits of CO2 reductions and inform agency decisions," and applied the metric in an environmental impact statement to monetize the emissions difference of about 5 million metric tons per year between the proposed oil and gas development project and the no-action baseline, *Draft Environmental Impact Statement—Liberty Development Project in the Beaufort Sea, Alaska* at 3-129, 4-50 (2017). More generally, agencies have used IWG's social cost of greenhouse gas estimates not only in scores of rulemakings but also in NEPA analyses for resource management decisions. *See* Peter Howard & Jason Schwartz, *Think Global: International Reciprocity as Justification for a Global Social Cost of Carbon*, 42 Columbia J. Envtl. L. 203, 270–84 (2017) (listing all uses by federal agencies through July 2016).

[66] States have used the social cost of greenhouse gases in decisions about electricity planning. *See* Iliana Paul et al., *The Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases and State Policy: A Frequently Asked Questions Guide* (Policy Integrity Report, 2017), http://policyintegrity.org/files/publications/SCC_State_Guidance.pdf.; *See also* Denise Grab et al., *Opportunities for Valuing Climate Impacts in U.S. States* (Policy Integrity Report, 2019), and Policy Integrity's COST OF CARBON website, available at http://costofcarbon.org/.

[67] These impacts are all included to some degree in the three integrated assessment models (IAMs) used by the IWG (namely, the DICE, FUND, and PAGE models), though some impacts are modeled incompletely, and many other important damage categories are currently omitted from these IAMs. *Compare* 2010 TSD, *supra* note 14; *with* Peter Howard, *Omitted Damages: What's Missing from the Social Cost of Carbon* (Cost of Carbon Project Report, 2014), http://costofcarbon.org/files/Omitted_Damages_Whats_Missing_From_the_Social_Cost_of_Carbon.pdf. For other lists of actual climate effects, including air quality mortality, extreme temperature mortality, lost labor productivity, harmful algal blooms, spread of West Nile virus, damage to roads and other infrastructure, effects on urban drainage, damage to coastal property, electricity demand and supply effects, water supply and quality effects, inland flooding, lost winter recreation, effects on agriculture and fish, lost ecosystem services from coral reefs, and wildfires, *see* EPA, *Multi-Model Framework for Quantitative Sectoral Impacts Analysis: A Technical Report for the Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017); U.S. Global Change Research Program, *Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017); EPA, *Climate Change in the*

greenhouse gas tool is that each physical impact—such as sea-level rise and increasing temperatures—need not be assessed in isolation. Instead, the social cost of greenhouse gases tool conveniently groups together a multitude of climate impacts and, consistent with NEPA regulations,[68] enables agencies to assess whether all those impacts are cumulatively potentially significant and to then compare those impacts with other impacts or alternatives using a common metric.

The Tons of Greenhouse Gas Emissions at Stake Here Are Clearly Potentially Significant

BLM quantifies upstream and downstream greenhouse gas emissions from the plan, amounting to as much as 76.87 billion metric tons per year from Alternative D.[69] But BLM refuses to take the straightforward next step of applying the social cost of greenhouse gas values to those quantified tons, claiming that it cannot determine the effects of the master development plan on climate change and minimizing the potential significance of the plan's emissions by presenting them as only a small percentage of the global concentration of greenhouse gas emissions.[70]

The threshold for monetization, to the extent that it exists at all, is well below the volumetric emissions estimates that BLM projects here. While the projected emissions from the least restrictive alternative in this plan total almost 77 million metric tons annually, numerous courts have held that far lower annual emissions totals warrant monetization. For instance, the court in *High Country* found that it was arbitrary for the Forest Service not to monetize the "1.23 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions [from methane] the West Elk mine emits annually."[71] Likewise, in *Center for Biological Diversity*, the Ninth Circuit found that it was arbitrary for the Department of Transportation not to monetize the 35 million metric ton difference in lifetime emissions from increasing the fuel efficiency of motor vehicles[72]: given the estimated lifetime of vehicles sold in the years 2008-2011 (sometimes estimated at about 15 years on average), this could represent as little 2 million metric tons per year. And in a recent environmental impact statement from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management ("BOEM"), the agency explained that the social cost of carbon was "a useful measure" for a NEPA analysis of an action anticipated to have a difference in greenhouse gas emissions compared to the no-action baseline of about 25 million metric tons over a 5-year period,[73] or about 5 million metric tons per year.

While there may not be a bright-line test, the emissions BLM estimates for this plan are potentially significant and warrant monetization. This is especially true since, once emissions have been quantified, the additional step of monetization through application of the IWG's cost estimates entails a simple arithmetic calculation.[74] It is difficult to understand how NEPA's mandate that an agency take a "hard look" at the potentially significant environmental impacts of its actions in an

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United States: Benefits of Global Action (2015); Union of Concerned Scientists, *Underwater: Rising Seas, Chronic Floods, and the Implications for U.S. Coastal Real Estate* (2018).

[68] 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(7) (explaining that actions can be significant if related to individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts).

[69] *See* DEIS at table 3-1, 3-2 (high annual emissions under Alternative D). Citation and use of BLM's estimates of emissions in these comments does not necessarily concede the accuracy or completeness of those estimates.

[70] *Id*. at 3-5-6.

[71] 52 F. Supp. 3d at 1191 (quoting an e-mail comment on the draft statement for the quantification of tons).

[72] 538 F.3d at 1187.

[73] BOEM, *Liberty Development and Production Plan Draft EIS* at 3-129, 4-50 (2017) (89,940,000 minus 64,570,000 is about 25 million).

[74] Agencies simply need to multiply their estimate of tons in each year by the IWG's 2016 values for the corresponding year of emissions (adjusted for inflation to current dollars). If the emissions change occurs in the future, agencies would then discount the products back to present value.

environmental impact statement can be satisfied if BLM fails to take the simple step of analyzing the potentially significant impacts of the greenhouse gas emissions that it quantifies.

Monetizing Climate Damages Is Appropriate and Useful Regardless of Whether Every Potentially Significant Effect Can Be Monetized in a Full Cost-Benefit Analysis

BLM further implies that use the social cost of greenhouse gases would be inappropriate because it has not monetized the plan's benefits.[75] This is mistaken for several reasons. First, as noted above, BLM *has* monetized the full benefits of the plan as an input into its calculation of government royalties.[76] BLM's repeated attempts to hide behind its failure to monetize the plan's benefits therefore fails.

But even accepting BLM's premise that it has not monetized the social benefits of the proposed plan, monetizing the plan's negative climate impacts would still provide useful information for decisonmakers and the public, and not skew the analysis. In particular, whether or not other effects are monetized, using the social cost of greenhouse gases will facilitate comparison between alternative options along the dimension of climate change. As discussed above, different alternatives could have varying greenhouse gas consequences over time, and monetization provides an appropriate means of comparing plan alternatives along the dimension of climate change.

Monetizing the plan's potentially significant climate effects could also provide a framework for making decisions when some effects but not others are monetized, through what is known as "break-even analysis." As described in the Office of Management and Budget's *Circular A-4*,[77] which provides guidance to agencies on conducting economic analysis including methods for weighing monetized and qualitative costs and benefits, agencies should carry out a "'break-even' analysis" when it is "not . . . possible to express in monetary units all of the important benefits and costs."[78] Under such an analysis, the agency considers "[h]ow small could the value of the non-quantified benefits be (or how large would the value of the non-quantified costs need to be) before the rule would yield zero net benefits."[79] Such an analysis could be useful here: Even if BLM is unable to fully monetize all costs and benefits, it could consider whether the alleged benefits of this proposal are worth the roughly $4.38 billion in annual climate costs.

Moreover, even without using something as formal as a break-even analysis, it is clear that monetizing climate damages provides useful information whether or not every effect can be monetized in a full cost-benefit analysis. NEPA regulations acknowledge that when monetization of costs and benefits is "relevant to the choice among environmentally different alternatives," "that analysis" can be presented alongside "any analyses of unquantified environmental impacts, values, and amenities."[80] In other words, contrary to BLM's argument against the use of the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics, the inability to monetize some impacts should not preclude the monetization of impacts—like climate damages—that can be readily monetized.

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[75] DEIS at G-9-10.

[76] *See supra* note 59 and accompanying text.

[77] OFFICE OF MGMT. & BUDGET, EXEC. OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OMB CIRCULAR A-4, REGULATORY ANALYSIS (2003). Though *Circular A-4* focuses on agencies' regulatory analyses under Executive Order 12,866, the document nevertheless more generally has distilled best practices on economic analysis and is a useful guide to all agencies undertaking an assessment of costs and benefits.

[78] *Id*. at 2.

[79] *Id*.

[80] 40 C.F.R. § 1502.23.

C. BLM Should Use the Interagency Working Group's 2016 Estimates of the Social Cost of Carbon, the Social Cost of Nitrous Oxide, and the Social Cost of Methane

In 2016, the IWG published updated central estimates for the social cost of greenhouse gases: $50 per ton of carbon dioxide, $1440 per ton of methane, and $18,000 per ton of nitrous oxide (in 2017 dollars for year 2020 emissions).[81] Agencies must continue to use estimates of a similar or higher[82] value in their analyses and decisionmaking. A recent Executive Order disbanding the IWG—which BLM credits in part for its decision not to monetize climate impacts[83]—does not change the fact that the IWG estimates still reflect the best available data and methodologies.

IWG's Methodology Is Rigorous, Transparent, and Based on the Best Available Data

Beginning in 2009, the IWG assembled experts from a dozen federal agencies and White House offices to "estimate the monetized damages associated with an incremental increase in carbon emissions in a given year" based on "a defensible set of input assumptions that are grounded in the existing scientific and economic literature."[84] IWG's methods combined three frequently used models built to predict the economic costs of the physical impacts of each additional ton of carbon.[85] The models together incorporate such damage categories as: agricultural and forestry impacts, coastal impacts due to sea level rise, impacts from extreme weather events, impacts to vulnerable market sectors, human health impacts including malaria and pollution, outdoor recreation impacts and other non-market amenities, impacts to human settlements and ecosystems, and some catastrophic impacts.[86] IWG ran these models using a baseline scenario including inputs and assumptions drawn from the peer-reviewed literature, and then ran the models again with an additional unit of carbon emissions to determine the increased economic damages.[87] IWG's social cost of carbon estimates were first issued in 2010 and have been updated several times to reflect the latest and best scientific and economic data.[88]

Following the development of estimates for carbon dioxide, the same basic methodology was used in 2016 to develop the social cost of methane and social cost of nitrous oxide—estimates that capture the distinct heating potential of methane and nitrous oxide emissions.[89] These additional metrics used the same economic models, the same treatment of uncertainty, and the same methodological assumptions that IWG applied to the social cost of carbon, and these new estimates underwent rigorous peer-review.[90]

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[81] U.S. Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, "Technical support document: Technical update of the social cost of carbon for regulatory impact analysis under executive order 12866 & Addendum: Application of the methodology to estimate the social cost of methane and the social cost of nitrous oxide" (2016), available at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/oira/social-cost-of-carbon.

[82] *See, e.g.*, Richard L. Revesz et al., *Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change*, 508 NATURE 173 (2014) (explaining that current estimates omit key damage categories and, therefore, are very likely underestimates).

[83] DEIS at G-9.

[84] 2010 TSD, *supra* note 14.

[85] *Id.* at 5. These models are DICE (the Dynamic Integrated Model of Climate and the Economy), FUND (the Climate Framework for Uncertainty, Negotiation, and Distribution), and PAGE (Policy Analysis of the Greenhouse Effect).

[86] *Id.* at 6–8.

[87] *Id.* at 24–25.

[88] IWG, *Technical Update of the Social Cost of Carbon* at 5–29 (2016). *Available at* https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/ scc_tsd_final_clean_8_26_16.pdf.

[89] *See* 2016 IWG Addendum at 2.

[90] *Id.* at 3.

IWG's methodology has been repeatedly endorsed by reviewers. In 2014, the U.S. Government Accountability Office concluded that IWG had followed a "consensus-based" approach, relied on peer-reviewed academic literature, disclosed relevant limitations, and adequately planned to incorporate new information through public comments and updated research.[91] In 2016 and 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine issued two reports that, while recommending future improvements to the methodology, supported the continued use of the existing IWG estimates.[92] And in 2016, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit held that the Department of Energy's reliance on IWG's social cost of carbon was reasonable.[93] It is, therefore, unsurprising that leading economists and climate policy experts have endorsed the IWG's values as the best available estimates.[94]

Furthermore, uncertainty over the values or range of values included in the IWG's social costs of greenhouse gases metric is not a reason to abandon the social cost of greenhouse gas methodologies;[95] quite the contrary, uncertainty supports higher estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases, because most uncertainties regarding climate change entail tipping points, catastrophic risks, and unknown unknowns about the damages of climate change. Because the key uncertainties of climate change include the risk of irreversible catastrophes, applying an options value framework to the regulatory context strengthens the case for ambitious regulatory action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Not only was justifying omitted climate damages due to uncertainty rejected by the Ninth Circuit in *Center for Biological Diversity*—"while . . . there is a range of values, the value of carbon emissions reduction is certainly not zero"[96]—but the range of values recommended by the IWG[97] and endorsed by the National Academies of Sciences[98] is rather manageable. In 2016, the IWG recommended values at discount rates from 2.5% to 5%, calculated as between $12 and $62 for year 2020 emissions.[99] Numerous federal agencies have had no difficulty either applying this range in their environmental impact statements or else focusing on the central estimate at a 3% discount rate.[100]

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[91] Gov't Accountability Office, *Regulatory Impact Analysis: Development of Social Cost of Carbon Estimates* 12–19 (2014). Available at http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/665016.pdf.

[92] Nat'l Acad. Sci., Engineering & Med., *Valuing Climate Damages: Updating Estimation of the Social Cost of Carbon Dioxide* 3 (2017), https://www.nap.edu/read/24651/chapter/1; Nat'l Acad. Sci., Engineering & Med., *Assessment of Approaches to Updating the Social Cost of Carbon: Phase 1 Report on a Near-Term Update* 1–2 (2016); https://www.nap.edu/read/21898/chapter/1.

[93] *Zero Zone, Inc. v. U.S. Dep't of Energy*, 832 F.3d 654, 678 (7th Cir. 2016).

[94] See, e.g., Richard Revesz et al., *Best Cost Estimate of Greenhouse Gases*, 357 Science 655 (2017); Michael Greenstone et al., *Developing a Social Cost of Carbon for U.S. Regulatory Analysis: A Methodology and Interpretation*, 7 Rev. Envtl. Econ. & Pol'y 23, 42 (2013); Revesz, *Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change*, *supra* note 82.

[95] *Center for Biological Diversity v. NHTSA*, 538 F.3d 1172, 1200 (9th Cir. 2008) ("[W]hile the record shows that there is a range of values, the value of carbon emissions reductions is certainly not zero.").

[96] 538 F.3d at 1200.

[97] *See* Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, *Technical Update* (2016) (hereinafter 2016 TSD).

[98] *See* National Academies of Sciences, *Assessment of Approaches to Updating the Social Cost of Carbon* (2016) (hereinafter First NAS Report) (endorsing continued near-term use of the IWG numbers; in 2017, the NAS recommended moving to a declining discount rate, *see* National Academies of Sciences, *Valuing Climate Damages* (2017) (hereinafter Second NAS Report).

[99] 2016 TSD. The values given here are in 2007$. The IWG also recommended a 95th percentile value of $123.

[100] BLM, *Envtl. Assessment—Waste Prevention, Prod. Subject to Royalties, and Res. Conservation* at 52 (2016); BLM, *Final Envtl. Assessment: Little Willow Creek Protective Oil and Gas Lease*, DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2014-0036-EA, at 82 (2015); Office of Surface Mining, *Final Envtl. Impact Statement—Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine Energy Project* at 4.2-26 to 4.2-27 (2015) (explaining the social cost of greenhouse gases "provide[s] further context and enhance[s] the discussion of climate change impacts in the NEPA analysis."); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Draft Envtl. Impact Statement for the Missouri River*

Most recently, in August 2017, BOEM applied the IWG's range of estimates calculated at three discount rates (2.5%, 3%, and 5%) to its environmental impact statement for an offshore oil development plan,[101] and called this range of estimates "a useful measure to assess the benefits of CO_2 reductions and inform agency decisions."[102]

A Recent Executive Order Does Not Change the Requirements to Monetize Climate Damages

In March 2017, President Trump disbanded the IWG and withdrew its technical support documents.[103] Nevertheless, Executive Order 13,783 assumes that federal agencies will continue to "monetiz[e] the value of changes in greenhouse gas emissions" and instructs agencies to ensure such estimates are "consistent with the guidance contained in OMB Circular A-4."[104] Consequently, while federal agencies no longer benefit from ongoing technical support from the IWG on using the social cost of greenhouse gases, by no means does the new Executive Order imply that agencies should not monetize potentially significant effects in their environmental impact statements. The Executive Order does not prohibit agencies from relying on the same choice of models as the IWG, the same inputs and assumptions as the IWG, the same statistical methodologies as the IWG, or the same ultimate values as derived by the IWG. To the contrary, because the Executive Order requires consistency with Circular A-4, as agencies follow the Circular's standards for using the best available data and methodologies, they will necessarily choose similar data, methodologies, and estimates as the IWG, since the IWG's work continues to represent the best available estimates.[105] The Executive Order does not preclude agencies from using the same range of estimates as developed by the IWG, so long as the agency explains that the data and methodology that produced those estimates are consistent with Circular A-4 and, more broadly, with standards for rational decisionmaking.

Similarly, the Executive Order's withdrawal of the Council on Environmental Quality's guidance on greenhouse gases,[106] does not—and legally cannot—remove agencies' statutory requirement to fully disclose the potentially significant environmental impacts of greenhouse gas emissions. As the Council on Environmental Quality explained in its withdrawal, the "guidance was not a regulation," and "[t]he withdrawal of the guidance does not change any law, regulation, or other legally binding requirement."[107] In other words, when the guidance originally recommended the appropriate use of the social cost of greenhouse gases in environmental impact statements,[108] it was simply explaining

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Recovery Mgmt. Project at 3-335 (2016); U.S. Forest Serv., *Rulemaking for Colorado Roadless Areas: Supplemental Final Envtl. Impact Statement* at 120–23 (Nov. 2016) (using both the social cost of carbon and social cost of methane relating to coal leases); NHTSA EIS, *Available at* http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/rulemaking/pdf/cafe/FINAL_EIS.pdf at 9-77.

[101] BOEM, *Liberty Development Project: Draft Environmental Impact Statement*, at 4-247 (2017).

[102] *Id.* at 3-129.

[103] Exec. Order No. 13,783 § 5(b), 82 Fed. Reg. 16,093 (Mar. 28, 2017).

[104] *Id.* § 5(c).

[105] *See* Richard L. Revesz et al., *Best Cost Estimate of Greenhouse Gases*, 357 SCIENCE 6352 (2017) (explaining that, even after Trump's Executive Order, the social cost of greenhouse gas estimate of around $50 per ton of carbon dioxide is still the best estimate).

[106] Exec. Order 13,783 § 3(c)

[107] 82 Fed. Reg. 16,576, 16,576 (Apr. 5, 2017).

[108] *See* CEQ, *Revised Draft Guidance on Consideration of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Effects of Climate Change in National Environmental Policy Act Reviews* at 16 (Dec. 2014), *available at* https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nepa_revised_draft_ghg_guidance_searchable.pdf ("[A]lthough developed specifically for regulatory impact analyses, the Federal social cost of carbon, which multiple Federal agencies have developed and used to assess the costs and benefits of alternatives in rulemakings, offers a harmonized, interagency metric that can provide decisionmakers and the public with some context for meaningful NEPA review.").

that the social cost of greenhouse gases is consistent with longstanding NEPA regulations and case law, all of which are still in effect today.

Notably, some agencies under the Trump administration have continued to use the IWG estimates even following the Executive Order. For example, in August 2017, the BOEM called the social cost of carbon "a useful measure" and applied it to analyze the consequences of offshore oil and gas drilling.[109] And in July 2017, the Department of Energy used the IWG's estimates for carbon and methane emissions to analyze energy efficiency regulation, describing the social cost of methane as having "undergone multiple stages of peer review."[110]

Two agencies have developed new "interim" values of the social cost of greenhouse gases following the Executive Order. Relying on faulty economic theory, these "interim" estimates drop the social cost of carbon from $50 per ton in year 2020 down to as little as $1 per ton, and drop the social cost of methane from $1420 per ton in year 2020 down to $58. These "interim" estimates are inconsistent with accepted science and economics; the IWG's 2016 estimates remain the best available estimates. The IWG's methodology and estimates have been repeatedly endorsed by reviewers as transparent, consensus-based, and firmly grounded in the academic literature. By contrast, the "interim" estimates ignore the interconnected, global nature of our climate-vulnerable economy, and obscure the devastating effects that climate change will have on younger and future generations. BLM should not use the "interim" social cost of greenhouse gas estimates because of its methodological flaws.

Uncertainty Supports Higher Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas Estimates, and Is Not a Reason to Abandon the Metric

Generally, uncertainty is *not* a reason to abandon the social cost of greenhouse gas methodologies;[111] quite the contrary, uncertainty supports higher estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases, because most uncertainties regarding climate change entail tipping points, catastrophic risks, and unknown unknowns about the damages of climate change. Because the key uncertainties of climate change include the risk of irreversible catastrophes, applying an options value framework to the regulatory context strengthens the case for ambitious regulatory action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

There are numerous well-established, rigorous analytical tools available to help agencies characterize and quantitatively assess uncertainty, such as Monte Carlo simulations, and the IWG's social cost of greenhouse gas protocol incorporates those tools. To further deal with uncertainty, the IWG recommended to agencies a range of four estimates: three central or mean-average estimates at a 2.5%, 3%, and 5% discount rate respectively, and a 95th percentile value at the 3% discount rate. While the IWG's technical support documents disclosed fuller probabilities distributions, these four estimates were chosen by agencies to be the focus for decisionmaking. In particular, application of the 95th percentile value was not part of an effort to show the probability distribution around the 3% discount rate; rather, the 95th percentile value serves as a methodological shortcut to approximate the uncertainties around low-probability but high-damage, catastrophic, or irreversible outcomes that are currently omitted or undercounted in the economic models.

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[109] *Draft Environmental Impact Statement—Liberty Development Project in the Beaufort Sea, Alaska* at 3-129.

[110] Energy Conservation Program: Energy Conservation Standards for Walk-In Cooler and Freezer Refrigeration Systems, 82 Fed. Reg. 31,808, 31,811, 31,857 (July 10, 2017).

[111] *Center for Biological Diversity v. NHTSA*, 538 F.3d 1172, 1200 (9th Cir. 2008) ("[W]hile the record shows that there is a range of values, the value of carbon emissions reductions is certainly not zero.").

The shape of the distribution of climate risks and damages includes a long tail of lower-probability, high-damage, irreversible outcomes due to "tipping points" in planetary systems, inter-sectoral interactions, and other deep uncertainties. Climate damages are not normally distributed around a central estimate, but rather feature a significant right skew toward catastrophic outcomes. In fact, a 2015 survey of economic experts concludes that catastrophic outcomes are increasingly likely to occur.[112] Because the three integrated assessment models that the IWG's methodology relied on are unable to systematically account for these potential catastrophic outcomes, a 95th percentile value was selected instead to account for such uncertainty. There are no similarly systematic biases pointing in the other direction which might warrant giving weight to a low-percentile estimate.

Additionally, the 95th percentile value addresses the strong possibility of widespread risk aversion with respect to climate change. The integrated assessment models do not reflect that individuals likely have a higher willingness to pay to reduce low-probability, high-impact damages than they do to reduce the likelihood of higher-probability but lower impact damages with the same expected cost. Beyond individual members of society, governments also have reasons to exercise some degree of risk aversion to irreversible outcomes like climate change.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine did recommend that the IWG document its full treatment of uncertainty in an appendix and disclose low-probability as well as high-probability estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases.[113] However, that does not mean it would be appropriate for individual agencies to rely on low-percentile estimates to justify decisions. While disclosing low-percentile estimates in a sensitivity analysis may promote transparency, relying on such an estimate for decisionmaking—in the face of contrary guidance from the best available science and economics on uncertainty and risk—would not be a "credible, objective, realistic, and scientifically balanced" approach to uncertainty, as required by Circular A-4.[114]

In short, the 95th percentile estimate attempts to capture risk aversion and uncertainties around lower-probability, high-damage, irreversible outcomes that are currently omitted or undercounted by the models. There is no need to balance out this estimate with a low-percentile value, because the reverse assumptions are not reasonable:

- There is no reason to believe the public or the government will be systematically risk seeking with respect to climate change.[115]
- The consequences of overestimating the risk of climate damages (i.e., spending more than we need to on mitigation and adaptation) are not nearly as irreversible as the consequences of underestimating the risk of climate damage (i.e., failing to prevent catastrophic outcomes).

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[112] Peter Howard and Derek Sylvan, *Expert Consensus on the Economics of Climate Change* 2 (2015), available at https://policyintegrity.org/files/publications/ExpertConsensusReport.pdf. ("Experts believe that there is greater than a 20% likelihood that this same climate scenario would lead to a 'catastrophic' economic impact (defined as a global GDP loss of 25% or more).").

[113] Nat'l Acad. Of Sci., *Assessment of Approaches to Updating the Social Cost of Carbon* 49 (2016) ("[T]he IWG could identify a high percentile (e.g., 90th, 95th) and corresponding low percentile (e.g., 10th, 5th) of the SCC frequency distributions on each graph.").

[114] CIRCULAR A-4 at 39.

[115] As a 2009 survey revealed, the vast majority of economic experts support the idea that "uncertainty associated with the environmental and economic effects of greenhouse gas emissions increases the value of emission controls, assuming some level of risk-aversion." *See Expert Consensus, supra* note 108, at 3 (citing 2009 survey).

- Though some uncertainties might point in the direction of lower social cost of greenhouse gas values, such as those related to the development of breakthrough adaptation technologies, the models already account for such uncertainties around adaptation; on balance, most uncertainties strongly point toward higher, not lower, social cost of greenhouse gas estimates.[116]
- There is no empirical basis for any "long tail" of potential benefits that would counteract the potential for extreme harm associated with climate change.

Moreover, even the best existing estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases are likely underestimated because the models currently omit many significant categories of damages—such as depressed economic growth, pests, pathogens, erosion, air pollution, fire, dwindling energy supply, health costs, political conflict, and ocean acidification, as well as tipping points, catastrophic risks, and unknown unknowns—and because of other methodological choices.[117]

Consequently, uncertainty suggests an even higher social cost of greenhouse gases and so is not a reason to abandon the metric, which would misleadingly suggest that climate damages are worthless.

A Global Perspective on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases Is Required to Capture All Factors Bearing on U.S. Public Welfare

BLM mentions the availability of new "interim" estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases that make changes "to the consideration of domestic versus international impacts and the consideration of appropriate discount rates."[118] Those two changes are inappropriate and violate the obligations under NEPA to assess environmental consequences.

NEPA contains a provision on "International and National Coordination of Efforts" that broadly requires that "all agencies of the Federal Government *shall* . . . recognize the worldwide and long-range character of environmental problems."[119] Using a global social cost of greenhouse gases to analyze and set policy fulfills these instructions. Furthermore, the Act requires agencies to, "where consistent with the foreign policy of the United States, lend appropriate support to initiatives, resolutions, and programs designed to maximize international cooperation in anticipating and preventing a decline in the quality of mankind's world environment."[120] By continuing to use the

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[116] *See* Revesz, *Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change*, *supra* note 82. R. Tol, *The Social Cost of Carbon*, 3 Annual Rev. Res. Econ. 419 (2011) ("[U]ndesirable surprises seem more likely than desirable surprises. Although it is relatively easy to imagine a disaster scenario for climate change—for example, involving massive sea level rise or monsoon failure that could even lead to mass migration and violent conflict—it is not at all easy to imagine that climate change will be a huge boost to human welfare.").

[117] *See* Revesz, *Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change*, *supra* note 82; Peter Howard, *Omitted Damages: What's Missing from the Social Cost of Carbon* (Cost of Carbon Project Report, 2014); Frances C. Moore & Delavane B. Diaz, *Temperature Impacts on Economic Growth Warrant Stringent Mitigation Policy*, 5 NATURE CLIMATE CHANGE 127 (2015) (demonstrating SCC may be biased downward by more than a factor of six by failing to include the climate's effect on economic growth).

[118] DEIS at G-9.

[119] 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(f) (emphasis added).

[120] 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(f); *see also Environmental Defense Fund v. Massey*, 986 F.2d 528, 535 (D.C. Cir. 1993) (confirming that Subsection F is mandatory); Natural Resources Defense Council v. NRC, 647 F.2d 1345, 1357 (D.C. Cir. 1981) ("This NEPA prescription, I find, looks toward cooperation, not unilateral action, in a manner consistent with our foreign policy."); *cf.* COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY, GUIDANCE ON NEPA ANALYSIS FOR TRANSBOUNDARY IMPACTS (1997), *available at* http://www.gc.noaa.gov/documents/transguide.pdf; Exec. Order No. 12,114, *Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions*, 44 Fed. Reg. 1957 §§ 1-1, 2-1 (Jan. 4, 1979) (applying to "major Federal actions . . . having significant effects on the

global social cost of greenhouse gases to spur reciprocal foreign actions, federal agencies "lend appropriate support" to the NEPA's goal of "maximize[ing] international cooperation" to protect "mankind's world environment." Furthermore, not only is it consistent with Circular A-4 and best economic practices to estimate the global damages of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in regulatory analyses and environmental impact statements, but no existing methodology for estimating a "domestic-only" value is reliable, complete, or consistent with Circular A-4.

Since at least 2010, including some recent agency actions under the Trump administration,[121] federal agencies based their regulatory decision and NEPA reviews on global estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases. Though agencies sometimes also disclosed a "highly speculative" range that tried to capture exclusively U.S. climate costs, emphasis on a global value was recognized as more accurate given the science and economics of climate change, as more consistent with best economic practices, and as crucial to advancing U.S. strategic goals.[122]

Opponents of climate regulation challenged the global number in court and other forums, and often attempted to use Circular A-4 as support.[123] Specifically, opponents have seized on Circular A-4's instructions to "focus" on effects to "citizens and residents of the United States," while any significant effects occurring "beyond the borders of the United States . . . should be reported separately."[124] Importantly, despite this language and such challenges, the U.S. Court of Appeals for

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environment outside the geographical borders of the United States," and enabling agency officials "to be informed of pertinent environmental considerations and to take such considerations into account . . . in making decisions regarding such actions").

[121] *See, e.g.*, Dep't of Energy, Energy Conservation Program: Energy Conservation Standards for Walk-In Cooler and Freezer Refrigeration Systems, 82 Fed. Reg. 31,808, 31,812 (July 10, 2017) ("DOE maintains that consideration of global benefits is appropriate because of the global nature of the climate change problem."); U.S. Dep't of Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Mgmt., Draft Envtl. Impact Statement: Liberty Development Project at 3-129, 4-246 (Aug. 2017) (BOEM, Liberty Development Project), *available at* https://cdxnodengn.epa.gov/cdx-enepa-II/public/action/eis/details?eisId= 236901 (calling the global social cost of carbon estimates developed in 2016 by the Interagency Working Group "a useful measure" and applying them to analyze the consequences of offshore oil and gas drilling); Dep't of Energy, Energy Conservation Program: Energy Conservation Standards for Air Compressors, 85 Fed. Reg. 1504, 1508 (Jan. 10, 2020) ("DOE maintain that consideration of global benefits is appropriate because of the global nature of the climate change problem."); *id.* at 1566 ("Following the recommendation of the IWG, DOE places more focus on a global measure of SC-CO2. The climate change problem is highly unusual in at least two respects. First, it involves a global externality: Emissions of most greenhouse gases contribute to damages around the world even when they are emitted in the United States. Consequently, to address the global nature of the problem, the SC-CO2 must incorporate the full (global) damages caused by GHG emissions. Second, climate change presents a problem that the United States alone cannot solve. Even if the United States were to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to zero, that step would be far from enough to avoid substantial climate change. Other countries would also need to take action to reduce emissions if significant changes in the global climate are to be avoided. Emphasizing the need for a global solution to a global problem, the United States has been actively involved in seeking international agreements to reduce emissions and in encouraging other nations, including emerging major economies, to take significant steps to reduce emissions. When these considerations are taken as a whole, the interagency group concluded that a global measure of the benefits from reducing U.S. emissions is preferable. DOE's approach is not in contradiction of the requirement to weigh the need for national energy conservation, as one of the main reasons for national energy conservation is to contribute to efforts to mitigate the effects of global climate change.").

[122] *See generally* Peter Howard & Jason Schwartz, *Think Global: International Reciprocity as Justification for a Global Social Cost of Carbon*, 42 Columbia J. Envtl. L. 203 (2017).

[123] Ted Gayer & W. Kip Viscusi, *Determining the Proper Scope of Climate Change Policy Benefits in U.S. Regulatory Analyses: Domestic versus Global Approaches*, 10 Rev. Envtl. Econ. & Pol'y 245 (2016) (citing Circular A-4 to argue against a global perspective on the social cost of carbon); *see also, e.g.*, Petitioners Brief on Procedural and Record-Based Issues at 70, in *West Virginia v. EPA*, case 15-1363, D.C. Cir. (filed February 19, 2016) (challenging EPA's use of the global social cost of carbon).

[124] Circular A-4 at 15. Note that A-4 slightly conflates "accrue to citizens" with "borders of the United States": U.S. citizens have financial and other interests tied to effects beyond the borders of the United States, as discussed further below.

the Seventh Circuit had no trouble concluding that a global focus for the social cost of greenhouse gases was reasonable:

> AHRI and Zero Zone [the industry petitioners] next contend that DOE [the Department of Energy] arbitrarily considered the global benefits to the environment but only considered the national costs. They emphasize that the [statute] only concerns "national energy and water conservation." In the New Standards Rule, DOE did not let this submission go unanswered. It explained that climate change "involves a global externality," meaning that carbon released in the United States affects the climate of the entire world. According to DOE, national energy conservation has global effects, and, therefore, those global effects are an appropriate consideration when looking at a national policy. Further, AHRI and Zero Zone point to no global costs that should have been considered alongside these benefits. Therefore, DOE acted reasonably when it compared global benefits to national costs.[125]

Circular A-4's reference to effects "beyond the borders" confirms that it is appropriate for agencies to consider the global effects of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. While Circular A-4 may suggest that most typical decisions should focus on U.S. effects, the Circular cautions agencies that special cases call for different emphases:

> [Y]ou cannot conduct a good regulatory analysis according to a formula. Conducting high-quality analysis requires competent professional judgment. ***Different regulations may call for different emphases*** in the analysis, ***depending on the nature and complexity*** of the regulatory issues and the sensitivity of the benefit and cost estimates to the key assumptions.[126]

In fact, Circular A-4 elsewhere assumes that agencies' analyses will not always be conducted from purely the perspective of the United States, as one of its instructions only applies "as long as the analysis is conducted from the United States perspective,"[127] suggesting that in some circumstances it is appropriate for the analysis to be global. For example, EPA and DOT have adopted a global perspective on the analysis of potential monopsony benefits to U.S. consumers resulting from the reduced price of foreign oil imports following energy efficiency increases, and EPA assesses the global potential for leakage of greenhouse gas emissions owing to U.S. regulation.[128]

Perhaps more than any other issue, the nature of the issue of climate change requires precisely such a "different emphasis" from the default domestic-only assumption. To avoid a global "tragedy of the commons" that could irreparably damage all countries, including the United States, every nation should ideally set policy according to the global social cost of greenhouse gases.[129] Climate and clean air are global common resources, meaning they are freely available to all countries, but any one country's use—i.e., pollution—imposes harms on the polluting country as well as the rest of the world. Because greenhouse pollution does not stay within geographic borders but rather mixes in the atmosphere and affects climate worldwide, each ton emitted by the United States not only creates

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[125] Zero Zone v. Dept. of Energy, 832 F.3d 654, 679 (7th Cir. 2016).

[126] Circular A-4 at 3 (emphasis added).

[127] *Id.* at 38 (counting international transfers as costs and benefits "as long as the analysis is conducted from the United States perspective").

[128] *See* Howard & Schwartz, *supra* note 122, at 268-69.

[129] *See* Garrett Hardin, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, 162 Science 1243 (1968) ("[E]ach pursuing [only its] own best interest . . . in a commons brings ruin to all.").

domestic harms, but also imposes large externalities on the rest of the world. Conversely, each ton of greenhouse gases abated in another country benefits the United States along with the rest of the world.

If all countries set their greenhouse emission levels based on only domestic costs and benefits, ignoring the large global externalities, the aggregate result would be substantially sub-optimal climate protections and significantly increased risks of severe harms to all nations, including the United States. Thus, basic economic principles demonstrate that the United States stands to benefit greatly if all countries apply global social cost of greenhouse gas values in their regulatory decisions and project reviews. Indeed, the United States stands to gain hundreds of billions or even trillions of dollars in direct benefits from efficient foreign action on climate change.[130]

In order to ensure that other nations continue to use global social cost of greenhouse gas values, it is important that the United States itself continue to do so.[131] The United States is engaged in a repeated strategic dynamic with several significant players—including the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, and others—that have already adopted a global framework for valuing the social cost of greenhouse gases.[132] For example, Canada and Mexico have explicitly borrowed the IWG's global SCC metric to set their own fuel efficiency standards.[133] For the United States to now depart from this collaborative dynamic by reverting to a domestic-only estimate would undermine the country's long-term interests and could jeopardize emissions reductions underway in other countries, which are already benefiting the United States.

For these and other reasons, the IWG properly relied on global estimates to develop its SCC metric, and many federal agencies have since relied on this global metric to evaluate and justify their decisions. At the same time, some agencies have, in addition to the global estimate, also disclosed a "highly speculative" estimate of the domestic-only effects of climate change. In particular, the Department of Energy always includes a chapter on a domestic-only value of carbon emissions in the economic analyses supporting its energy efficiency standards; EPA has also often disclosed similar estimates.[134] Such an approach is consistent with Circular A-4's suggestion that agencies should usually disclose domestic effects separately from global effects. However, as we have discussed, reliance on a domestic-only methodology would be inconsistent with both the inherent nature of climate change and the standards of Circular A-4. Consequently, it is appropriate under Circular A-4 for agencies to continue to rely on global estimates of the social cost of greenhouses to justify their regulatory decisions or their choice of alternatives under NEPA.

Moreover, no current methodology can accurately estimate a "domestic-only" value of the social cost of greenhouse gases. OMB, the National Academies of Sciences, and the economic literature all

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[130] Policy Integrity, *Foreign Action, Domestic Windfall: The U.S. Economy Stands to Gain Trillions from Foreign Climate Action* (2015), http://policyintegrity.org/files/publications/ForeignActionDomesticWindfall.pdf

[131] *See* Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* 10-11 (1984) (on repeated prisoner's dilemma games).

[132] *See* Howard & Schwartz, *supra* note 122, at Appendix B.

[133] *See* Heavy-Duty Vehicle and Engine Greenhouse Gas Emission Regulations, SOR/2013-24, 147 Can. Gazette pt. II, 450, 544 (Can.), *available at* http://canadagazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2013/2013-03-13/html/sor-dors24-eng.html ("The values used by Environment Canada are based on the extensive work of the U.S. Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Carbon."); Jason Furman & Brian Deese, *The Economic Benefits of a 50 Percent Target for Clean Energy Generation by 2025*, White House Blog, June 29, 2016 (summarizing the North American Leader's Summit announcement that U.S., Canada, and Mexico would "align" their SCC estimates).

[134] Howard & Schwartz, *supra* note 122, at 220-21.

agree that existing methodologies for calculating a "domestic-only" value of the social cost of greenhouse gases are deeply flawed and result in severe and misleading underestimates. In developing the social cost of carbon, the IWG did offer some such domestic estimates. Using the results of one economic model (FUND) as well as the U.S. share of global gross domestic product (GDP), the group generated an "approximate, provisional, and ***highly speculative***" range of 7–23% of the global social cost of carbon as an estimate of the purely direct climate effects to the United States.[135] Yet, as the IWG itself acknowledged, this range is almost certainly an underestimate because it ignores significant, indirect costs to trade, human health, and security that are likely to "spill over" into the United States as other regions experience climate change damages, among other effects.[136]

Neither the existing IAMs nor a share of global GDP are appropriate bases for calculating a domestic-only estimate. The IAMs were never designed to calculate a domestic SCC, since a global SCC is the economic efficient value. FUND, like other IAMS, includes some simplifying assumptions: of relevance, FUND and the other IAMs are not able to capture the adverse effects that the impacts of climate change in other countries will have on the United States through trade linkages, national security, migration, and other forces.[137] This is why the IWG characterized the domestic-only estimate from FUND as a "highly speculative" underestimate. Similarly, a domestic-only estimate based on some rigid conception of geographic borders or U.S. share of world GDP will fail to capture all the climate-related costs and benefits that matter to U.S. citizens.[138] U.S. citizens have economic and other interests abroad that are not fully reflected in the U.S. share of global GDP. GDP is a "monetary value of final goods and services—that is, those that are bought by the final user—produced in a country in a given period of time."[139] GDP therefore does not reflect significant U.S. ownership interests in foreign businesses, properties, and other assets, as well as consumption abroad including tourism,[140] or even the 8 million Americans living abroad.[141] At the same time, GDP is also over-inclusive, counting productive operations in the United States that are owned by foreigners. Gross National Income (GNI), by contrast, defines its scope not by location but by ownership interests.[142] However, not only has GNI fallen out of favor as a metric used in

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[135] INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL COST OF CARBON, TECHNICAL SUPPORT DOCUMENT: SOCIAL COST OF CARBON FOR REGULATORY IMPACT ANALYSIS UNDER EXECUTIVE ORDER 12,866 at 11 (2010) (emphasis added).

[136] *Id.* (explaining that the IAMs, like FUND, do "not account for how damages in other regions could affect the United States (e.g., global migration, economic and political destabilization").

[137] *See, e.g.*, Dept. of Defense, *National Security Implications of Climate-Related Risks and a Changing Climate* (2015), *available at* http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/150724-congressional-report-on-national-implications-of-climate-change.pdf?source=govdelivery.

[138] A domestic-only SCC would fail to "provide to the public and to OMB a careful and transparent analysis of the anticipated consequences of economically significant regulatory actions." Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, *Regulatory Impact Analysis: A Primer* 2 (2011).

[139] Tim Callen, *Gross Domestic Product: An Economy's All*, IMF, http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/basics/gdp.htm (last updated Mar. 28, 2012).

[140] "U.S. residents spend millions each year on foreign travel, including travel to places that are at substantial risk from climate change, such as European cities like Venice and tropical destinations like the Caribbean islands." David A. Dana, *Valuing Foreign Lives and Civilizations in Cost-Benefit Analysis: The Case of the United States and Climate Change Policy* (Northwestern Faculty Working Paper 196, 2009), http://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1195&context=facultyworkingpapers.

[141] Assoc. of Americans Resident Oversees, https://www.aaro.org/about-aaro/6m-americans-abroad. Admittedly 8 million is only 0.1% of the total population living outside the United States.

[142] *GNI, Atlas Method (Current US$)*, THE WORLD BANK, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.ATLS.CD.

international economic policy,[143] but using a domestic-only SCC based on GNI would make the SCC metrics incommensurable with other costs in regulatory impact analyses, since most regulatory costs are calculated by U.S. agencies regardless of whether they fall to U.S.-owned entities or to foreign-owned entities operating in the United States.[144] Furthermore, both GDP and GNI are dependent on what happens in other countries, due to trade and the international flow of capital. The artificial constraints of both metrics counsel against a rigid split based on either U.S. GDP or U.S. GNI.[145]

Of course, there already are and will continue to be significant, quantifiable, localized effects of climate change.[146] For example, a peer-reviewed EPA report, *Climate Change in the United States: Benefits of Global Action*, found that by the end of the century, the U.S. economy could face damages of $110 billion annually in lost labor productivity alone due to extreme temperatures, plus $11 billion annually in agricultural damages, $180 billion in losses to key economic sectors due to water shortages, and $5 trillion in damages U.S. coastal property.[147] But the existence of those examples of quantifiable estimates of localized damages does not mean that the current IAMs are able to extrapolate a U.S.-only number that accurately reflects total domestic damages—especially since, as already explained, the IAMs do not reflect spill overs.

As a result, in 2015, OMB concluded, along with several other agencies, that "good methodologies for estimating domestic damages do not currently exist."[148] Similarly, the NAS recently concluded that current IAMs cannot accurately estimate the domestic social cost of greenhouse gases, and that estimates based on U.S. share of global GDP would be likewise insufficient.[149] William Nordhaus, the developer of the DICE model, cautioned earlier this year that "regional damage estimates are both incomplete and poorly understood," and "there is little agreement on the distribution of the SCC by region."[150] In short, any domestic-only estimate will be inaccurate, misleading, and out of step with the best available economic literature, in violation of Circular A-4's standards for information quality.

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[143] *Id*.

[144] U.S. Office of Management and Budget & Secretariat General of the European Commission, *Review of Application of EU and US Regulatory Impact Assessment Guidelines on the Analysis of Impacts on International Trade and Development* 13 (2008).

[145] Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on Regulating Greenhouse Gas Emissions Under the Clean Air Act, 73 Fed. Reg. 44,354, 44,415 (July 30, 2008) ("Furthermore, international effects of climate change may also affect domestic benefits directly and indirectly to the extent U.S. citizens value international impacts (e.g., for tourism reasons, concerns for the existence of ecosystems, and/or concern for others); U.S. international interests are affected (e.g., risks to U.S. national security, or the U.S. economy from potential disruptions in other nations).").

[146] *See generally* U.S. Global Change Research Program, *Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017) (substantiating that significant climate impacts are already underway in the United States and are project to worsen); *see also, e.g.*, Union of Concerned Scientists, *Underwater: Rising Seas, Chronic Floods, and the Implications for U.S. Coastal Real Estate* (2018).

[147] EPA, *Climate Change in the United States: Benefits of Global Action* (2015); *see also* EPA, *Multi-Model Framework for Quantitative Sectoral Impacts Analysis: A Technical Report for the Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017) (quantifying physical and economic damages to multiple U.S. sectors, but acknowledging that only a "small portion of the impacts of climate change are estimated").

[148] In November 2013, OMB requested public comments on the social cost of carbon. In 2015, OMB along with the rest of the Interagency Working Group issued a formal response to those comments. Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Carbon, *Response to Comments: Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis under Executive Order 12,866* at 36 (July 2015) [hereinafter, OMB 2015 Response to Comments].

[149] Nat'l Acad. Sci., *Valuing Climate Damages: Updating Estimation of the Social Cost of Carbon Dioxide* at 53 (2017).

[150] William Nordhaus, *Revisiting the Social Cost of Carbon*, 114 PNAS 1518, 1522 (2017).

For more details on the justification for a global value of the social cost of greenhouse gases, please see Peter Howard & Jason Schwartz, *Think Global: International Reciprocity as Justification for a Global Social Cost of Carbon*, 42 Columbia J. Envtl. L. 203 (2017). Another strong defense of the global valuation as consistent with best economic practices appears in a letter published in a recent issue of *The Review of Environmental Economics and Policy*, co-authored by the late Nobel laureate economist Kenneth Arrow.[151]

A Strong Consensus Exists to Use a 3% or Lower (or Declining) Discount Rate for a Central Estimate

The DEIS complains that the "range" of estimates for the social cost of greenhouse gases—which is largely a function of using different assumptions about the discount rate—makes the metric not useful.[152] Not only was this line of thinking rejected by the Ninth Circuit in *Center for Biological Diversity*—"while . . . there is a range of values, the value of carbon emissions reduction is certainly not zero"[153]—but the range of values recommended by the Interagency Working Group[154] and endorsed by the National Academies of Sciences[155] is rather manageable. In 2016, the IWG recommended values at discount rates from 2.5% to 5%, calculated as between $12 and $62 for year 2020 emissions.[156] Numerous federal agencies have had no difficulty either applying this range in their environmental impact statements or else focusing on the central estimate at a 3% discount rate.[157] In August 2017, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management applied the IWG's range of estimates calculated at three discount rates (2.5%, 3%, and 5%) to its environmental impact statement for an offshore oil development plan,[158] and called this range of estimates "a useful measure to assess the benefits of CO_2 reductions and inform agency decisions."[159] And just last month, the Department of Energy explained that the "central value" of 3 percent was "consistent with estimates provided in the economics literature and OMB's Circular A-4 guidance for the consumption rate of interest."[160]

More importantly, there is widespread consensus that a central estimate calculated at a 3% or lower discount rate, or else using a declining discount rate, is most appropriate, while a 7% discount rate

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[151] Richard Revesz, Kenneth Arrow et al., *The Social Cost of Carbon: A Global Imperative*, 11 REEP 172 (2017).

[152] DEIS at G-10.

[153] 538 F.3d at 1200.

[154] *See* 2016 TSD, *supra* note 24.

[155] *See* National Academies of Sciences, *Assessment of Approaches to Updating the Social Cost of Carbon* (2016) [hereinafter First NAS Report] (endorsing continued near-term use of the IWG numbers); in 2017, the NAS recommended moving to a declining discount rate, *see* National Academies of Sciences, *Valuing Climate Damages* (2017) [hereinafter Second NAS Report].

[156] 2016 TSD, *supra* note 24. The values given here are in 2007$. The IWG also recommended a 95th percentile value of $123.

[157] E.g., BLM, *Envtl. Assessment—Waste Prevention, Prod. Subject to Royalties, and Res. Conservation* at 52 (2016); BLM, *Final Envtl. Assessment: Little Willow Creek Protective Oil and Gas Lease*, DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2014-0036-EA, at 82 (2015); Office of Surface Mining, *Final Envtl. Impact Statement—Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine Energy Project* at 4.2-26 to 4.2-27 (2015) (explaining the social cost of greenhouse gases "provide[s] further context and enhance[s] the discussion of climate change impacts in the NEPA analysis."); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Draft Envtl. Impact Statement for the Missouri River Recovery Mgmt. Project* at 3-335 (2016); U.S. Forest Serv., *Rulemaking for Colorado Roadless Areas: Supplemental Final Envtl. Impact Statement* at 120-123 (Nov. 2016) (using both the social cost of carbon and social cost of methane relating to coal leases).

[158] BOEM, *Liberty Development Project: Draft Environmental Impact Statement*, at 4-247 (2017).

[159] *Id.* at 3-129.

[160] See e.g., Energy Conservation Program: Energy Conservation Standards for Uninterruptible Power Supplies, 85 Fed. Reg. 1447, 1480 (Jan. 10, 2020), supra note 121.

would be wholly inappropriate in the context of intergenerational climate damages. Because of the long lifespan of greenhouse gases and the long-term or irreversible consequences of climate change, the effects of today's emissions changes will stretch out over the next several centuries. The time horizon for an agency's analysis of climate effects, as well as the discount rate applied to future costs and benefits, determines how an agency treats future generations. Current central estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases are based on a 3% discount rate and a 300-year time horizon. Executive Order 13,783 disbanded the Interagency Working Group in March 2017 and instructs agencies to reconsider the "appropriate discount rates" when monetizing the value of climate effects.[161] By citing the official guidance on typical regulatory impact analyses (namely, *Circular A-4*), the Order implicitly called into question the IWG's choice not to use a 7% discount rate. However, use of a 7% discount would not only be inconsistent with best economic practices but would violate NEPA's requirements to consider potentially significant future impacts.

NEPA requires agencies to weigh the "relationship between local short-term uses of man's environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity," as well as "any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources."[162] That requirement is prefaced with a congressional declaration of policy that explicitly references the needs of future generations:

> The Congress, recognizing the profound impact of man's activity on the interrelations of all components of the natural environment . . . declares that it is the continuing policy of the Federal Government . . . to use all practicable means and measures . . . to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and **future generations** of Americans.[163]

When the Congressional Conference Committee adopted that language, it reported that the first "broad national goal" under the statute is to "fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for future generations. It is recognized in this [congressional] statement [of policy] that each generation has a responsibility to improve, enhance, and maintain the quality of the environment *to the greatest extent possible for the continued benefit of future generations*."[164]

Because applying a 7% discount rate to the social cost of greenhouse gases could drop the valuation essentially to $0, use of such a rate effectively ignores the needs of future generations. Doing so would arbitrarily fail to consider an important statutory factor that Congress wrote into the requirements of NEPA.

Moreover, a 7% discount rate is inconsistent with best economic practices, including under Circular A-4. In 2015, OMB explained that "Circular A-4 is a ***living document***. . . . [T]he use of ***7 percent is <u>not</u> considered appropriate*** for intergenerational discounting. There is wide support for this view in the academic literature, and it is recognized in Circular A-4 itself. "[165] While Circular A-4 tells

[161] Exec. Order No. 13,783 § 5(c).
[162] 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C).
[163] 42 U.S.C. § 4331.
[164] *See* 115 Cong. Rec. 40419 (1969) (emphasis added); *see also* same in S. Rep. No. 91-296 (1969).
[165] Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Carbon, *Response to Comments: Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis under Executive Order 12,866* at 36 (July 2015) [hereinafter, OMB 2015 Response to Comments].

agencies generally to use a 7% discount rate in addition to lower rates for typical rules,[166] the guidance does not intend for default assumptions to produce analyses inconsistent with best economic practices. Circular A-4 clearly supports using lower rates to the exclusion of a 7% rate for the costs and benefits occurring over the extremely long, 300-year time horizon of climate effects.

Circular A-4 requires agency analysts to do more than rigidly apply default assumptions: "You cannot conduct a good regulatory analysis according to a formula. Conducting high-quality analysis requires competent professional judgment."[167] As such, analysis must be "based on the best reasonably obtainable scientific, technical, and economic information available,"[168] and agencies must "***[u]se sound and defensible values*** or procedures to monetize benefits and costs, and ensure that key analytical assumptions are defensible."[169] Rather than assume a 7% discount rate should be applied automatically to every analysis, Circular A-4 requires agencies to justify the choice of discount rates for each analysis: "[S]tate in your report what assumptions were used, *such as . . . the discount rates* applied to future benefits and costs," and explain "clearly how you arrived at your estimates."[170] Based on Circular A-4's criteria, there are numerous reasons why applying a 7% discount rate to climate effects that occur over a 300-year time horizon would be unjustifiable.

First, basing the discount rate on the **consumption rate of interest** is the correct framework for analysis of climate effects; a discount rate based on the private return to capital is inappropriate. Circular A-4 does suggest that a 7% rate should be a "default position" for regulations that primarily displace capital investments; however, the Circular explains that "[w]hen regulation primarily and directly affects private consumption . . . *a lower discount rate is appropriate*."[171] The 7% discount rate is based on a private sector rate of return on capital, but private market participants typically have short time horizons. By contrast, climate change concerns the public well-being broadly. Rather than evaluating an optimal outcome from the narrow perspective of investors alone, applying economic theory to climate policy requires analysts to make the optimal choices based on societal preferences and social discount rates. Moreover, because climate change is expected to largely affect large-scale consumption, as opposed to capital investment,[172] a 7% rate is inappropriate.

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[166] Office of Mgmt. & Budget, *Circular A-4* at 36 (2003) ("For regulatory analysis, you should provide estimates of net benefits using both 3 percent and 7 percent….If your rule will have important intergenerational benefits or costs you might consider a further sensitivity analysis using a lower but positive discount rate in addition to calculating net benefits using discount rates of 3 and 7 percent.").

[167] *Id.* at 3.

[168] *Id.* at 17.

[169] *Id.* at 27 (emphasis added).

[170] *Id.* at 3 (emphasis added).

[171] *Id.* at 33 (emphasis added).

[172] "There are two rationales for discounting future benefits—one based on consumption and the other on investment. The consumption rate of discount reflects the rate at which society is willing to trade consumption in the future for consumption today. Basically, we discount the consumption of future generations because we assume future generations will be wealthier than we are and that the utility people receive from consumption declines as their level of consumption increases. . . . The investment approach says that, as long as the rate of return to investment is positive, we need to invest less than a dollar today to obtain a dollar of benefits in the future. Under the investment approach, the discount rate is the rate of return on investment. If there were no distortions or inefficiencies in markets, the consumption rate of discount would equal the rate of return on investment. There are, however, many reasons why the two may differ. As a result, using a consumption rather than investment approach will often lead to very different discount rates." Maureen Cropper, *How Should Benefits and Costs Be Discounted in an Intergenerational Context?*, 183 RESOURCES 30, 33.

In 2013, OMB called for public comments on the social cost of greenhouse gases. In its 2015 Response to Comment document,[173] OMB (together with the other agencies from the IWG) explained that

> [T]he consumption rate of interest is the correct concept to use . . . as the impacts of climate change are measured in consumption-equivalent units in the three IAMs used to estimate the SCC. This is consistent with OMB guidance in Circular A-4, which states that when a regulation is expected to primarily affect private consumption—for instance, via higher prices for goods and services—it is appropriate to use the consumption rate of interest to reflect how private individuals trade-off current and future consumption.[174]

The Council of Economic Advisers similarly interprets Circular A-4 as requiring agencies to choose the appropriate discount rate based on the nature of the regulation: "[I]n Circular A-4 by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) the appropriate discount rate to use in evaluating the net costs or benefits of a regulation depends on whether the regulation primarily and directly affects private consumption or private capital."[175] The National Academies of Sciences also explained that a consumption rate of interest is the appropriate basis for a discount rate for climate effects.[176] For this reason, 7% is an inappropriate choice of discount rate for the impacts of climate change.[177] Finally, each of the three integrated assessment models upon which the social cost of greenhouse gas estimates are based—DICE, FUND, and PAGE—uses consumption discount rates; a capital discount rate is thus inconsistent with the underlying models. For these reasons, 7% is an inappropriate choice of discount rate for the impacts of climate change.

Second, **uncertainty over the long time horizon** of climate effects should drive analysts to select a lower discount rate. As an example of when a 7% discount rate is appropriate, Circular A-4 identifies an EPA rule with a 30-year timeframe of costs and benefits.[178] By contrast, greenhouse gas emissions generate effects stretching out across 300 years. As Circular A-4 notes, while "[p]rivate market rates provide a reliable reference for determining how society values time within a generation, but for extremely long time periods no comparable private rates exist."[179]

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[173] Note that this document was not withdrawn by Executive Order 13,783.

[174] OMB 2015 Response to Comments, *supra* note 165, at 22.

[175] Council of Econ. Advisers, *Discounting for Public Policy: Theory and Recent Evidence on the Merits of Updating the Discount Rate* at 1 (CEA Issue Brief, 2017), *available at* https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/page/files/201701_cea_discounting_issue_brief.pdf. In theory, the two rates would be the same, but "given distortions in the economy from taxation, imperfect capital markets, externalities, and other sources, the SRTP and the marginal product of capital need not coincide, and analysts face a choice between the appropriate opportunity cost of a project and the appropriate discount rate for its benefits." *Id.* at 9. The correct discount rate for climate change is the social return to capital (i.e., returns minus the costs of externalities), not the private return to capital (which measures solely the returns).

[176] NAS Second Report, *supra* note 155, at 28; *see also* Kenneth Arrow et al., *Is There a Role for Benefit-Cost Analysis in Environmental, Health, and Safety Regulation?*, 272 Science 221 (1996) (explaining that a consumption-based discount rate is appropriate for climate change).

[177] *See also* this article by the former chair of the NAS panel on the social cost of greenhouse gases: Richard Newell, *Unpacking the Administration's Revised Social Cost of Carbon*, Oct. 10, 2017, http://www.rff.org/blog/2017/unpacking-administration-s-revised-social-cost-carbon ("It is clearly inappropriate, therefore, to use such modeling results with OMB's 7 percent discount rate."); *see also* Comments from Robert Pindyck, to BLM, on the Social Cost of Methane in the Proposed Suspension of the Waste Prevention Rule, BLM-2017-0002-16107 (submitted Nov. 5, 2017) (explaining that 3%, not 7%, is the appropriate discount rate).

[178] Circular A-4 at 34. *See also* OMB 2015 Response to Comments, *supra* note 165, at 21 ("While most regulatory impact analysis is conducted over a time frame in the range of 20 to 50 years . . . ").

[179] Circular A-4 at 36.

Circular A-4 discusses how uncertainty over long time horizons drives the discount rate lower: "the longer the horizon for the analysis," the greater the "uncertainty about the appropriate value of the discount rate," which supports a lower rate.[180] Circular A-4 cites the work of renowned economist Martin Weitzman and concludes that the "certainty-equivalent discount factor corresponds to ***the minimum discount rate having any substantial positive probability***."[181] The NAS makes the same point about discount rates and uncertainty.[182] In fact, uncertainty over the discount rate is best addressed by adopting a declining discount rate framework.

Third, a 7% discount rate **ignores catastrophic risks and the welfare of future generations**. As demonstrated in the frequency distribution graphs included in some agencies' recent and misguided attempts to calculate the social cost of greenhouse gases at a 7% discount rate,[183] the 7% rate truncates the long right-hand tail of social costs relative to the 3% rate's distribution. The long right-hand tail represents the possibility of catastrophic damages. The 7% discount rate effectively assumes that present-day Americans are barely willing to pay anything at all to prevent medium- to long-term catastrophes. This assumption violates statutory duties under NEPA to protect the future needs of Americans. At the same time, the 7% distribution also misleadingly exaggerates the possibility of negative estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases.[184] A negative social cost of greenhouse gases implies a discount rate so high that society is willing to sacrifice serious impacts to future generations for the sake of small, short-term benefits (such as slightly and temporarily improved fertilization for agriculture). Again, this assumption contravenes statutory responsibilities to protect the welfare of future Americans.

Fourth, a 7% discount rate would be inappropriate for climate change because it is based on **outdated data and diverges from the current economic consensus**. Circular A-4 requires that assumptions—including discount rate choices—are "based on the best reasonably obtainable scientific, technical, and economic information available."[185] Yet Circular A-4's own default assumption of a 7% discount rate was published 14 years ago and was based on data from decades ago.[186] Circular A-4's guidance on discount rates is in need of an update, as the Council of Economic Advisers detailed in 2017 after reviewing the best available economic data and theory:

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[180] *Id*.

[181] *Id*. (emphasis added); *see also* CEA, *supra* note 175, at 9: "Weitzman (1998, 2001) showed theoretically and Newell and Pizer (2003) and Groom et al. (2007) confirm empirically that discount rate uncertainty can have a large effect on net present values. A main result from these studies is that if there is a persistent element to the uncertainty in the discount rate (e.g., the rate follows a random walk), then it will result in an effective (or certainty-equivalent) discount rate that declines over time. Consequently, lower discount rates tend to dominate over the very long term, regardless of whether the estimated investment effects are predominantly measured in private capital or consumption terms (see Weitzman 1998, 2001; Newell and Pizer 2003; Groom et al. 2005, 2007; Gollier 2008; Summers and Zeckhauser 2008; and Gollier and Weitzman 2010)."

[182] NAS Second Report, *supra* note 155, at 27.

[183] *E.g.*, EPA, *Estimated Cost Savings and Forgone Benefits Associated with the Proposed Rule, "Oil and Natural Gas: Emission Standards for New, Reconstructed, and Modified Sources: Stay of Certain Requirements"* at 19 (Oct. 17, 2017).

[184] In the Monte Carlo simulation data from EPA, the 7% discount rate doubles the frequency of negative estimates compared to the 3% discount rate simulations, from a frequently of 4% to 8%.

[185] CEQ regulations implementing NEPA similarly require that information in NEPA documents be "of high quality" and states that "[a]ccurate scientific analysis . . . [is] essential to implementing NEPA." 40 C.F.R. § 1500.1(b).

[186] The 7% rate was based on a 1992 report; the 3% rate was based on data from the thirty years preceding the publication of Circular A-4 in 2003. Circular A-4 at 33.

> The discount rate guidance for Federal policies and projects was last revised in 2003. Since then a general reduction in interest rates along with a reduction in the forecast of long-run interest rates, warrants serious consideration for a reduction in the discount rates used for benefit-cost analysis.[187]

In addition to recommending a value below 7% as the discount factor based on private capital returns, the Council of Economic Advisers further explains that, because long-term interest rates have fallen, a discount rate based on the consumption rate of interest "should be at most 2 percent."[188] The latest OMB updates to Circular A-94, the document on which Circular A-4 based its discount rates,[189] also show that more up-to-date long-run discount rates are historically low. In the February 2018 update to Circular A-94's discount rates, OMB found that the real, 30-year discount rate is 0.6 percent,[190] the lowest rate since the OMB began tracking the number.[191] Notably, OMB also shows that the current real interest rate is negative for maturities less than 7 years.[192]

These low interest rates further confirm that applying a 7% rate to a context like climate change would be wildly out of step with the latest data and theory. Similarly, recent expert elicitations—a technique supported by Circular A-4 for filling in gaps in knowledge[193]—indicate that a growing consensus among experts in climate economics for a discount rate between 2% and 3%; 5% represents the upper range of values recommended by experts, and few to no experts support discount rates greater than 5% being applied to the costs and benefits of climate change.[194] Based on current economic data and theory, the most appropriate discount rate for climate change is 3% or lower.

Fifth, Circular A-4 requires more of analysts than giving all possible assumptions and scenarios equal attention in a sensitivity analysis; if alternate assumptions would fundamentally change the decision, Circular A-4 requires analysts to select the **most appropriate assumptions from the sensitivity analysis**.

Circular A-4 indicates that significant intergenerational effects will warrant a special sensitivity analysis focused on discount rates even lower than 3%:

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[187] CEA, *supra* note 175, at 1; *id.* at 3 ("In general the evidence supports lowering these discount rates, with a plausible best guess based on the available information being that the lower discount rate should be at most 2 percent while the upper discount rate should also likely be reduced."); *id.* at 6 ("The Congressional Budget Office, the Blue Chip consensus forecasts, and the Administration forecasts all place the ten year treasury yield at less than 4 percent in the future, while at the same time forecasting CPI inflation of 2.3 or 2.4 percent per year. The implied real ten year Treasury yield is thus below 2 percent in all these forecasts.").

[188] *Id.* at 1.

[189] Circular A-4 at 33.

[190] OMB Circular A-94 Appendix C (2018).

[191] https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/a94/dischist-2017.pdf.

[192] Circular A-94 Appendix C.

[193] Circular A-4 at 41.

[194] Peter Howard & Derek Sylvan, *The Economic Climate: Establishing Expert Consensus on the Economics of Climate Change* (Inst. Policy Integrity Working Paper 2015/1); M.A. Drupp, et al., *Discounting Disentangled: An Expert Survey on the Determinants of the Long-Term Social Discount Rate* (London School of Economics and Political Science Working Paper, May 2015) (finding consensus on social discount rates between 1-3%).

> Special ethical considerations arise when comparing benefits and costs across generations. . . It may not be appropriate for society to demonstrate a similar preference when deciding between the well-being of current and future generations. . . If your rule will have important intergenerational benefits or costs you might consider a further sensitivity analysis using a lower but positive discount rate in addition to calculating net benefits using discount rates of 3 and 7 percent.[195]

Elsewhere in Circular A-4, OMB clarifies that sensitivity analysis should not result in a rigid application of all available assumptions regardless of plausibility. Circular A-4 instructs agencies to depart from default assumptions when special issues "call for different emphases" depending on "the sensitivity of the benefit and cost estimates to the key assumptions."[196] More specifically:

> If benefit or cost estimates depend heavily on certain assumptions, you should make those assumptions explicit and carry out *sensitivity analyses using plausible alternative assumptions*. If the value of net benefits changes from positive to negative (or vice versa) or if the relative ranking of regulatory options changes with alternative plausible assumptions, you should conduct further analysis to determine ***which of the alternative assumptions is more appropriate***.[197]

In other words, if using a 7% discount rate would fundamentally change the agency's decision compared to using a 3% or lower discount rate, the agency must evaluate which assumption is most appropriate. Since OMB, the Council of Economic Advisers, the National Academies of Sciences, and the economic literature all conclude that a 7% rate is inappropriate for climate change, agencies should select a 3% or lower rate. Applying a 7% rate to climate effects cannot be justified "based on the best reasonably obtainable scientific, technical, and economic information available" and is inconsistent with the proper treatment of uncertainty over long time horizons.

Finally, to the extent there is uncertainty around the discount rate over long periods of time, the growing economic consensus supports shifting to a declining discount rate framework. Circular A-4 contemplates the use of declining discount rates in its reference to the work of Weitzman.[198] As the Council of Economic Advisers explained earlier this year, Weitzman and others developed the foundation for a declining discount rate approach, wherein rates start relatively higher for near-term costs and benefits but steadily decline over time according to a predetermined schedule until, in the very long-term, very low rates dominate due to uncertainty.[199] The National Academies of Sciences' report also strongly endorses a declining discount rate approach due to uncertainty.[200] In other words,

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[195] Circular A-4 at 35-36.

[196] *Id.* at 3.

[197] *Id.* at 42 (emphasis added).

[198] Circular A-4, at page 36, cites to Weitzman's chapter in Portney & Weyant, eds. (1999); that chapter, at page 29, recommends a declining discount rate approach: "a sliding-scale social discounting strategy" with the rate at 3-4% through year 25; then around 2% until year 75; then around 1% until year 300; and then 0% after year 300.

[199] CEA, *supra* note 175, at 9 ("[A]nother way to incorporate uncertainty when discounting the benefits and costs of policies and projects that accrue in the far future—applying discount rates that decline over time. This approach uses a higher discount rate initially, but then applies a graduated schedule of lower discount rates further out in time. The first argument is based on the application of the Ramsey framework in a stochastic setting (Gollier 2013), and the second is based on Weitzman's 'expected net present value' approach (Weitzman 1998, Gollier and Weitzman 2010). In light of these arguments, the governments of the United Kingdom and France apply declining discount rates to their official public project evaluations.").

[200] NAS Second Report, *supra* note 155.

the rational response to a concern about uncertainty over the discount rate is not to abandon the social cost of greenhouse gas methodology, but to apply declining discount rates and to treat the estimates calculated at a constant 3% rate as conservative lower-bound estimates.

One possible schedule of declining discount rates was proposed by Weitzman.[201] It is derived from a broad survey of top economists and other climate experts and explicitly incorporates arguments around interest rate uncertainty. Work by Arrow *et al*, Cropper *et al*, and Gollier and Weitzman, among others, similarly argue for a declining interest rate schedule and lay out the fundamental logic.[202] Another schedule of declining discount rates has been adopted by the United Kingdom.[203] Shifting to a declining discount rate framework would increase the social cost of greenhouse gases.[204] Consequently, a central estimate calculated at 3% should be considered a lower-bound of the social cost of greenhouse gases. But even providing a lower-bound estimate of the social cost of greenhouse gases helps inform decisionmakers and the public, and BLM is here required by NEPA to provide some monetization of climate damages, consistent with economic best practices.

Similarly, a 300-year time horizon is required by best economic practices. In 2017, the National Academies of Sciences issued a report stressing the importance of a longer time horizon for calculating the social cost of greenhouse gases. The report states that, "[i]n the context of the socioeconomic, damage, and discounting assumptions, the time horizon needs to be long enough to capture the vast majority of the present value of damages."[205] The report goes on to note that the length of the time horizon is dependent "on the rate at which undiscounted damages grow over time and on the rate at which they are discounted. Longer time horizons allow for representation and evaluation of longer-run geophysical system dynamics, such as sea level change and the carbon cycle."[206] In other words, after selecting the appropriate discount rate based on theory and data (in this case, 3% or below), analysts should determine the time horizon necessary to capture all costs and benefits that will have important net present values at the discount rate. Therefore, a 3% or lower discount rate for climate change implies the need for a 300-year horizon to capture all significant values. NAS reviewed the best available, peer-reviewed scientific literature and concluded that the

[201] Martin L. Weitzman, *Gamma Discounting*, 91 AM. ECON. REV. 260, 270 (2001). Weitzman's schedule is as follows:

1-5 years	6-25 years	26-75 years	76-300 years	300+ years
4%	3%	2%	1%	0%

[202] Kenneth J. Arrow et al., *Determining Benefits and Costs for Future Generations*, 341 SCIENCE 349 (2013); Kenneth J. Arrow et al., *Should Governments Use a Declining Discount Rate in Project Analysis?*, REV ENVIRON ECON POLICY 8 (2014); Maureen L. Cropper et al., *Declining Discount Rates*, AMERICAN ECONOMIC REVIEW: PAPERS AND PROCEEDINGS (2014); Christian Gollier & Martin L. Weitzman, *How Should the Distant Future Be Discounted When Discount Rates Are Uncertain?* 107 ECONOMICS LETTERS 3 (2010).

[203] Joseph Lowe, H.M. Treasury, U.K., Intergenerational Wealth Transfers and Social Discounting: Supplementary Green Book Guidance 5 (2008), *available at* http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/4(5).pdf. The U.K. declining discount rate schedule that subtracts out a time preference value is as follows:

0-30 years	31-75 years	76-125 years	126-200 years	201-300 years	301+ years
3.00%	2.57%	2.14%	1.71%	1.29%	0.86%

[204] This assumes the use of reasonable values in the Ramsey equation. But in general, as compared to a constant discount rate, a declining rate approach should decrease the effective discount rate.

[205] NAS Second Report, *supra* note 155, at 78.

[206] *Id.*

effects of greenhouse gas emissions over a 300-year period are sufficiently well established and reliable as to merit consideration in estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases.[207]

Sincerely,

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* No part of this document purports to present New York University School of Law's views, if any.

[207] NAS First Report, *supra* note 155, at 32.

May 24, 2019

To: Pecos District Office, Oklahoma Field Office, and Rio Puerco Field Office, BLM

Subject: Comments on Failure to Monetize Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the Environmental Assessments for September 2019 Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sales

Submitted by: Environmental Defense Fund, Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University School of Law, Montana Environmental Information Center, Sierra Club, Union of Concerned Scientists, and The Wilderness Society[1]

The following comments focus on the failure to monetize climate damages in the Environmental Assessments (EAs) for BLM's September 2019 Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sales from the Pecos District Office, Oklahoma Field Office, and Rio Puerco Field Office. BLM estimates and quantifies at least some direct, upstream, and downstream greenhouse gas emissions from oil and gas leasing, but BLM fails to include a monetized estimate or meaningful assessment of the significance of any of the actual, real-world climate damages those emissions will produce.

BLM dedicates an Appendix in each EA to attempt to defend why the agency has chosen not to use the social cost of greenhouse gases metric to monetize the action's emissions.[2] BLM's arguments are wrong, and these comments explain why BLM's reasoning is flawed and how BLM has violated its obligations under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Specifically, we make the following points:

1. Application of the social cost of greenhouse gases is not limited to rulemakings; NEPA requires agencies to fully and accurately estimate environmental, public health, and social welfare differences between alternatives, and the social cost of greenhouse gases is the best available tool to compare the climate impacts of alternatives;
2. Executive Order 13,783 does not bar agencies from using the same methodology and inputs applied by the Interagency Working Group (IWG) to develop its best estimates of social cost of greenhouse gases and, in fact, by requiring agencies to use best practices, the Executive Order would point agencies toward the same or higher values of global climate damages as calculated by the IWG;
3. Although NEPA does not require a formal cost-benefit analysis, the statute does require a "reasonably thorough discussion" and "necessary contextual information" on real-world climate impacts and their significance. The social cost of greenhouse gases provides such information, whereas a volumetric estimate of emissions does not meaningfully contextualize the significance of a proposed action's incremental contribution to climate change;
4. These EAs tier to RMPs that monetized a number of other effects of oil and gas leasing, including royalties and labor income, and so BLM must give climate effects the same consideration. When

[1] Our organizations may separately and independently submit other comments on other issues raised by the EAs.
[2] Appendix E in the Rio Puerco and Pecos EAs; Appendix D in the Oklahoma EA; the text is nearly identical in each.

an agency monetizes a proposed action's potential benefits—as BLM does here—the potential climate costs must be treated with proportional rigor. Additionally, simply because not every effect can be monetized does not mean that monetization is not a useful analytical tool.

5. In addition to using the Social Cost of Carbon to monetize the climate damages from downstream emissions, BLM should use the Social Cost of Methane to monetize upstream methane emissions.

We explain each of these points in turn below.

I. BLM Must Monetize the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases in Its EAs

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the statute under which environmental impact statements are required, directs agencies to fully and accurately analyze the environmental, public health, and social welfare differences between proposed alternatives, and to contextualize that information for decision-makers and the public. NEPA requires a more searching analysis than merely disclosing the amount of pollution. Rather, BLM must examine the "ecological[,]… economic, [and] social" impacts of those emissions, including an assessment of their "significance."[3] By failing to use available tools, such as the social cost of carbon, to analyze the significance of emissions, BLM violated NEPA.

Monetizing Climate Damages Fulfills the Obligations and Goals of NEPA

When a proposed action has climate consequences that must be assessed under NEPA, monetizing the climate damages fulfills an agency's legal obligations under NEPA in ways that simple quantification of tons of greenhouse gas emissions cannot. NEPA requires "hard look" consideration of beneficial and adverse effects of each alternative option for major federal government actions. The U.S. Supreme Court has called the disclosure of impacts the "key requirement of NEPA," and held that agencies must "consider and disclose the *actual environmental effects*" of a proposed action in a way that "brings those effects to bear on [the agency's] decisions."[4] Courts have repeatedly concluded that an environmental impact statement must disclose relevant climate effects.[5] NEPA requires "a reasonably thorough discussion of the significant aspects of the probable environmental consequences," to "foster both informed decisionmaking and informed public participation."[6] In particular, "[t]he impact of greenhouse gas emissions on climate change is precisely the kind of cumulative impact analysis that NEPA requires," and it is arbitrary to fail to "provide the necessary contextual information about the cumulative and incremental environmental impacts."[7] Furthermore, the analyses included in environmental assessments and impact statements "cannot be misleading."[8] An agency must provide

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[3] 40 C.F.R. §§ 1508.8(b), 1502.16(a)-(b).

[4] *Baltimore Gas & Elec. Co. v. Natural Res. Def. Council*, 462 U.S. 87, 96 (1983) (emphasis added); *see also* 40 C.F.R. § 1508.8(b) (requiring assessment of the "ecological," "economic," "social," and "health" "*effects*") (emphasis added).

[5] As the Ninth Circuit has held: "[T]he fact that climate change is largely a global phenomenon that includes actions that are outside of [the agency's] control . . . does not release the agency from the duty of assessing the effects of *its* actions on global warming within the context of other actions that also affect global warming." *Ctr. for Biological Diversity v. Nat'l Highway Traffic Safety Admin.*, 538 F.3d 1172, 1217 (9th Cir. 2008); *see also Border Power Plant Working Grp. v. U.S. Dep't of Energy*, 260 F. Supp. 2d 997, 1028-29 (S.D. Cal. 2003) (failure to disclose project's indirect carbon dioxide emissions violates NEPA).

[6] *Ctr. for Biological Diversity*, 538 F.3d at 1194 (citations omitted).

[7] *Id.* at 1217.

[8] *High Country Conservation Advocates v. U.S. Forest Service*, 52 F. Supp. 3d 1174, 1182 (D. Colo. 2014); *accord. Johnston v. Davis*, 698 F.2d 1088, 1094-95 (10th Cir. 1983) (disapproving of "misleading" statements resulting in "an unreasonable comparison of alternatives"); *Hughes River Watershed Conservancy v. Glickman*, 81 F.3d 437, 446 (4th Cir. 1996) ("For an EIS to serve these functions" of taking a hard look and allowing the public to play a role in decisionmaking, "it is essential that the EIS

sufficient informational context to ensure that decisionmakers and the public will not misunderstand or overlook the magnitude of a proposed action's climate risks compared to the no action alternative. As this section explains, by only quantifying the volume of greenhouse gas emissions, agencies fail to assess and disclose the actual climate consequences of an action and misleadingly present information in ways that will cause decisionmakers and the public to overlook important climate consequences. Using the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics to monetize climate damages fulfills NEPA's legal obligations in ways that quantification alone cannot.

BLM Must Assess Actual Incremental Climate Impacts, Not Just the Volume of Emissions

The tons of greenhouse gases emitted by a proposed action are not the "actual environmental effects" under NEPA. Rather, the actual effects and relevant factors are the incremental climate impacts caused by those emissions, including:[9]

- property lost or damaged by sea-level rise, coastal storms, flooding, and other extreme weather events, as well as the cost of protecting vulnerable property and the cost of resettlement following property losses;
- changes in energy demand, from temperature-related changes to the demand for cooling and heating;
- lost productivity and other impacts to agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, due to alterations in temperature, precipitation, CO_2 fertilization, and other climate effects;
- human health impacts, including cardiovascular and respiratory mortality from heat-related illnesses, changing disease vectors like malaria and dengue fever, increased diarrhea, and changes in associated pollution;
- changes in fresh water availability;
- ecosystem service impacts;
- impacts to outdoor recreation and other non-market amenities; and
- catastrophic impacts, including potentially rapid sea-level rise, damages at very high temperatures, or unknown events.

Even in combination with a general, qualitative discussion of climate change, by calculating only the tons of greenhouse gases emitted or a percent comparison to sectoral or national emissions, an agency fails

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not be based on misleading economic assumptions"); *see also Sierra Club v. Sigler*, 695 F.2d 957, 979 (5th Cir. 1983) (holding that an agency's "skewed cost-benefit analysis" was "deficient under NEPA"); *see generally Bus. Roundtable v. SEC*, 647 F.3d 1144, 1148-49 (D.C. Cir. 2011) (criticizing an agency for "inconsistently and opportunistically fram[ing] the costs and benefits of the rule" and for "fail[ing] adequately to quantify the certain costs or toe explain why those costs could not be quantified").

[9] These impacts are all included to some degree in the three integrated assessment models (IAMs) used by the IWG (namely, the DICE, FUND, and PAGE models), though some impacts are modeled incompletely, and many other important damage categories are currently omitted from these IAMs. *Compare* Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Carbon, *Technical Support Document: Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis* at 6-8, 29-33 (2010), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/for-agencies/Social-Cost-of-Carbon-for-RIA.pdf [hereinafter 2010 TSD]; *with* Peter Howard, *Omitted Damages: What's Missing from the Social Cost of Carbon* (Cost of Carbon Project Report, 2014), http://costofcarbon.org/files/Omitted_Damages_Whats_Missing_From_the_Social_Cost_of_Carbon.pdf. For other lists of actual climate effects, including air quality mortality, extreme temperature mortality, lost labor productivity, harmful algal blooms, spread of west nile virus, damage to roads and other infrastructure, effects on urban drainage, damage to coastal property, electricity demand and supply effects, water supply and quality effects, inland flooding, lost winter recreation, effects on agriculture and fish, lost ecosystem services from coral reefs, and wildfires, *see* EPA, *Multi-Model Framework for Quantitative Sectoral Impacts Analysis: A Technical Report for the Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017); U.S. Global Change Research Program, *Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017); EPA, *Climate Change in the United States: Benefits of Global Action* (2015); Union of Concerned Scientists, *Underwater: Rising Seas, Chronic Floods, and the Implications for U.S. Coastal Real Estate* (2018).

to meaningfully assess the actual incremental impacts to property, human health, productivity, and so forth.[10] An agency therefore falls short of its legal obligations and statutory objectives by focusing just on volume estimates. Similarly, courts have held that just quantifying the acres of timber to be harvested or the miles of road to be constructed does not constitute a "description of *actual* environmental effects," even when paired with a qualitative "list of environmental concerns such as air quality, water quality, and endangered species," when the agency fails to assess "the degree that each factor will be impacted."[11] Not only has BLM failed to assess the degree to which each category of climate damages will be impacted by the program, but BLM does not even qualitatively list all the relevant environmental concerns. For example, the Oklahoma EA cites to "Chapter 25: Southwest" of the *Fourth National Climate Assessment*,[12] even though neither Oklahoma nor Kansas (i.e., the locations of the nominated parcels) are in the Southwest region.[13] And neither the Pecos EA nor the Rio Puerco EA (nor, for that matter, the Oklahoma EA) mentions climate impacts to energy infrastructure or indigenous peoples, despite being identified as "key" impacts of climate in the Southwest (and also in the Southern Great Plains) by the *Fourth National Climate Assessment*.[14]

By monetizing climate damages using the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics, BLM can satisfy the legal obligations and statutory goals to assess the incremental and actual effects bearing on the public interest. The social cost of greenhouse gas methodology calculates how the emission of an additional unit of greenhouse gases affects atmospheric greenhouse concentrations, how that change in atmospheric concentrations changes temperature, and how that change in temperature incrementally contributes to the above list of economic damages, including property damages, energy demand effects, lost agricultural productivity, human mortality and morbidity, lost ecosystem services and non-market amenities, and so forth.[15] The social cost of greenhouse gas tool therefore captures the factors that actually affect public welfare and assesses the degree of impact to each factor, in ways that just estimating the volume of emissions cannot.

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[10] *See High Country*, 52 F. Supp. 3d at 1190 ("Beyond quantifying the amount of emissions relative to state and national emissions and giving general discussion to the impacts of global climate change, [the agencies] did not discuss the impacts caused by these emissions."); *Mont. Envtl. Info. Ctr. v. U.S. Office of Surface Mining*, 274 F. Supp. 3d 1074, 1096–99 (D. Mont. 2017) (rejecting the argument that the agency "reasonably considered the impact of greenhouse gas emissions by quantifying the emissions which would be released if the [coal] mine expansion is approved, and comparing that amount to the net emissions of the United States").

[11] *Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Ctr. v. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 387 F.3d 989, 995 (9th Cir. 2004) ("A calculation of the total number of acres to be harvested in the watershed is . . . not a sufficient description of the actual environmental effects that can be expected from logging those acres."); *see also Oregon Natural Res. Council v. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 470 F.3d 818 (9th Cir. 2006). Similarly, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit has found that merely listing "the quantity of . . . heat, chemicals, and radioactivity released" is insufficient under NEPA if the agency "does not reveal the meaning of those impacts in terms of human health or other environmental values." NRDC v. U.S. Nuclear Reg. Comm'n, 685 F.2d 459, 487 (D.C. Cir. 1982), rev'd sub nom. on other grounds Baltimore Gas & Elec. Co., 462 U.S. at 106-07 ("agree[ing] with the Court of Appeals that NEPA requires an EIS to disclose the significant health, socioeconomic, and cumulative consequences of the environmental impact of a proposed action," but finding that the specific "consequences of effluent releases" could be assessed at a subsequent stage in the particular proceeding under review).

[12] DOI-BLM-NM-0004-2019-0044-EA at 22 (citing to Gonzalez et al. 2018); *id.* at 31 (listing Gonzalez et al., "Southwest" chapter, and linking to chapter 25).

[13] *See* https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/25/ (listing Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah as the Southwest, but not Oklahoma or Kansas).

[14] *Compare* DOI-BLM-NM-A010-2019-0030-EA at 35-36, 38 & DOI-BLM-NM-P000-2019-0003 at 35-36, 38 (not mentioning, for example, impacts to energy infrastructure or indigenous peoples) *with* https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/25/ (highlighting impacts to Southwestern energy and indigenous peoples as "key messages") & https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/23/ (listing similar but still distinct key impact categories).

[15] 2010 TSD, *supra* note 9, at 5.

Climate Damages Depend on Stock and Flow, But Volume Estimates Only Measure Flow

The climate damage generated by each additional ton of greenhouse gas emissions depends on the background concentration of greenhouse gases in the global atmosphere. Once emitted, greenhouse gases can linger in the atmosphere for centuries, building up the concentration of radiative-forcing pollution and affecting the climate in cumulative, non-linear ways.[16] As physical and economic systems become increasingly stressed by climate change, each marginal additional ton of emissions has a greater, non-linear impact. The climate damages generated by a given amount of greenhouse pollution is therefore a function not just of the pollution's total volume but also the year of emission, and with every passing year an additional ton of emissions inflicts greater damage.[17]

As a result, focusing just on the volume or rate of emissions, as BLM does here,[18] is insufficient to reveal the incremental effect on the climate. The change in the rate of emissions (flow) must be assessed given the background concentration of emissions (stock). A percent comparison to national emissions is perhaps even more misleading. A proposed action that adds 23 million additional tons per year of carbon dioxide would have contributed to 0.43% of total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions in the year 2012.[19] In the year 2014, that same proposed action with the same carbon pollution would have contributed to just 0.41% of total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions—a seemingly smaller relative effect, since the total amount of U.S. emissions increased from 2012 to 2014.[20] However, because of rising background concentrations of global greenhouse gas stock, and because of growing stresses in physical and economic systems, the marginal climate damages per ton of carbon dioxide (as measured by the social cost of carbon) increased from $33 in 2012 to $35 in 2014 (in 2007$).[21] Consequently, those 23 million additional tons would have caused marginal climate damages costing $759 million in the year 2012, but by 2014 that same 23 million tons would have caused $805 million in climate damages. To summarize: the percent comparison to national emissions misleadingly implied that a proposed action adding 23 million more tons of carbon dioxide would have a relatively less significant effect in 2014 than in 2012, whereas monetizing climate damages would accurately reveal that the emissions in 2014 were much more damaging than the emissions in 2012—almost $50 million more.

Capturing how marginal climate damages change as the background concentration changes is especially important because NEPA requires assessing both present and future impacts.[22] Different alternatives can have different greenhouse gas consequences over time. Most simply, different alternatives could have different start dates or other consequential changes in timing. Here, BLM seems to aggregate all downstream greenhouse gas emissions from across the entire production period,[23] without calculating annual emissions, and so obscures the fact that the year of emissions matters, as the same annual tons

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[16] Carbon dioxide also has cumulative effects on ocean acidification, in addition to cumulative radiative-forcing effects.

[17] *See* 2010 TSD, *supra* note 9, at 33 (explaining that the social cost of greenhouse gas estimates grow over time).

[18] E.g., DOI-BLM-NM-P000-2019-0003 at 38..

[19] Total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions in 2012 were 5,366.7 million metric tons (for all greenhouse gases, emissions were 6,529 MMT CO2 eq). *See* EPA, *Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2016* at ES-6, tbl. ES-2 (2018).

[20] Total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions in 2014 were 5,568.8 million metric tons (and for all greenhouse gases, 6,763 MMT CO2 eq.) *Id.*

[21] Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, *Technical Support Document: Technical Update of the Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis* at 25 tbl. A1 (2016) (calculating the central estimate at a 3% discount rate), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/scc_tsd_final_clean_8_26_16.pdf [hereinafter 2016 TSD].

[22] NEPA requires agencies to weigh the "relationship between local short-term uses of man's environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity," as well as "any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources." 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C).

[23] *E.g.*, DOI-BLM-NM-P000-2019-0003 at 39 (listing 6.9 million metric tons of CO_2e from "downstream/end-use").

of emissions will cause more climate damages in a future year, when background greenhouse gas concentrations have increased. For example, 5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emitted in 2020 will cause $255 million in damages, while 5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emitted in 2050 will cause $418 million in damages.[24] For the reasons explained above, calculating volumes or percentages, especially on an average annual basis, is insufficient to accurately compare the climate damages of proposed alternatives with varying greenhouse gas emissions over time.

By factoring in projections of the increasing global stock of greenhouse gases as well as increasing stresses to physical and economic systems, the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics enable accurate and transparent comparisons of proposed actions with varying greenhouse gas emissions over time.

Monetization Provides the Required Informational Context that Volume Estimates Lack

NEPA requires sufficient informational context. Yet without proper context, numbers like a 0.0012% increase in total U.S. emissions from the Pecos lease sale's estimated upstream emissions[25] will be misinterpreted by people as meaningless, as zero. Indeed, in a country of over 300 million people and over 6.5 billion tons of annual greenhouse gas emissions, it is far too easy to make highly significant effects appear relatively trivial.[26] For example, presenting all weather-related deaths as less than 0.1% of total U.S. deaths makes the risk of death by weather event sound trivial, but in fact that figure represents over 2,000 premature deaths per year[27]—hardly an insignificant figure.[28]

Economic theory explains why monetization is a much better tool than volume estimates or percent comparisons to provide the necessary contextual information on climate damages. For example, many decisionmakers and interested citizens would wrongly reduce down to zero the climate risks associated with a 0.0012% of U.S. emissions,[29] simply due to the leading zero before the decimal in that percentage. As Professor Cass Sunstein has explained—drawing from the work of recent Nobel laureate economist Richard Thaler—a well-documented mental heuristic called "probability neglect" causes people to irrationally reduce small probability risks entirely down to zero.[30] People have significant "difficulty understanding a host of numerical concepts, especially risks and probabilities."[31] Characterizing an annual emissions from well development and production as just 0.0012% of U.S. emissions misleadingly makes the climate impacts appear vanishingly small. By comparison, by applying the social cost of carbon dioxide (about $51 per ton for year 2020 emissions in 2017$[32]), decisionmakers

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[24] When calculating the total present value of the entire stream of future climate damages, damages caused by pollution emitted in future years must be discounted back to present value.

[25] E.g., DOI-BLM-NM-P000-2019-0003 at 38.

[26] California CEQA guidance, "A project's incremental contribution may be cumulatively considerable even if it appears relatively small compared to statewide, national or global emissions."

[27] *Compare* Nat'l Ctr. for Health Stat., Ctrs. for Disease Control & Prevention, *Death Attributed to Heat, Cold, and Other Weather Events in the United States, 2006-2010* at 1 (2014) (reporting about 2000 weather-related deaths per year) *with* Nat'l Ctr. for Health Stat., *Deaths and Mortality*, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm (reporting about 2.7 million U.S. deaths per year total).

[28] The public willingness to pay to avoid mortality is typically estimated at around $9.6 million (in 2016$). E.g., 83 Fed. Reg. 12,086, 12,098 (Mar. 19, 2018) (U.S. Coast Guard rule using the Department of Transportation's value of statistical life in a recent analysis of safety regulations). Losing 2,000 lives prematurely to weather-related events is equivalent to a loss of public welfare worth over $19 billion per year.

[29] DOI-BLM-NM-P000-2019-0003 at 38.

[30] Cass R. Sunstein, *Probability Neglect: Emotions, Worst Cases, and Law*, 112 Yale L. J. 61, 63, 72 (2002).

[31] Valerie Reyna & Charles Brainerd, *Numeracy, Ratio Bias, and Denominator Neglect in Judgments of Risk and Probability*, 18 Learning & Individual Differences 89 (2007).

[32] 2016 TSD, *supra* note 21.

and the public can readily comprehend that the Pecos District September 2019 lease sales will cause at least an additional $3.9 million per year in climate damages from upstream emissions alone.[33]

Similarly, many people will be unable to distinguish the significance of proposed alternatives or scenario analyses with different emissions: for example, 4 million tons of downstream emissions from crude oil production versus 2.9 million tons from gas production.[34] As the Environmental Protection Agency's website explains, "abstract measurements" of so many tons of greenhouse gases can be rather inscrutable for the public, unless "translat[ed] . . . into concrete terms you can understand."[35] Abstract volume estimates fail to give people the required informational context due to another well-documented mental heuristic called "scope neglect." Scope neglect, as explained by Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, among others, causes people to ignore the size of a problem when estimating the value of addressing the problem. For example, in one often-cited study, subjects were unable to meaningfully distinguish between the value of saving 2,000 migratory birds from drowning in uncovered oil ponds, as compared to saving 20,000 birds.[36]

Scope neglect means many decisionmakers and members of the public would be unable to meaningfully distinguish between the climate risks of 2.9 million and 4 million metric tons of CO_2e. While decisionmakers and the public certainly can discern that one number is higher, without any context it may be difficult to weigh the relative magnitude of the climate risks. In contrast, the different climate risks would have been readily discernible through application of the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics. For example, while BLM has not provided annual downstream emission figures, if the total estimated downstream emissions were all valued using the social cost of carbon for year 2020 emissions (note that the social cost of carbon increases over time), the total downstream emissions of 6.9 million metric tons would be valued at over $350 million in total climate damages.

In general, non-monetized effects are often irrationally treated as worthless.[37] On several occasions, courts have struck down administrative decisions for failing to give weight to non-monetized effects.[38] Most relevantly, in *Center for Biological Diversity v. NHTSA*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit found it arbitrary and capricious to give zero value "to the most significant benefit of more stringent [fuel economy] standards: reduction in carbon emissions."[39] Monetizing climate damages provides the informational context required by NEPA, whereas a simple tally of emissions volume and

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[33] This calculation in no way accepts BLM's quantification of annual average emissions as accurate or complete. A higher estimate of emissions, based on different and perhaps more reasonable assumptions and modeling, would produce a higher monetized damage figure. Also note that in a proper cost-benefit analysis, future costs and benefits would be discounted to present value.

[34] *E.g.*, DOI-BLM-NM-P000-2019-0003 at 39. Use of these numbers in no way accepts BLM's calculations as accurate or complete.

[35] EPA, *Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator*. *Available at* https://web.archive.org/web/20180212182940/ https:/www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator (last updated Sept. 2017) ("Did you ever wonder what reducing carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions by 1 million metric tons means in everyday terms? The greenhouse gas equivalencies calculator can help you understand just that, translating abstract measurements into concrete terms you can understand.").

[36] Daniel Kahneman et al., *Economic Preferences or Attitude Expressions? An Analysis of Dollar Responses to Public Issues*, 19 J. Risk & Uncertainty 203, 212-213 (1999).

[37] Richard Revesz, *Quantifying Regulatory Benefits*, 102 Cal. L. Rev. 1424, 1434-35, 1442 (2014).

[38] *See id.* at 1428, 1434.

[39] 538 F.3d at 1199.

rote, qualitative, generic description of climate change are misleading and fail to give the public and decisionmakers the required information about the magnitude of discrete climate effects.[40]

Climate Effects Must Be Monetized If Other Costs and Benefits Are Monetized

Though NEPA does not always require a full and formal cost-benefit analysis,[41] agencies' approaches to assessing costs and benefits must be balanced and reasonable. Courts have warned agencies, for example, that "[e]ven though NEPA does not require a cost-benefit analysis," an agency cannot selectively monetize benefits in support of its decision while refusing to monetize the costs of its action.[42]

In *High Country Conservation Advocates v. Forest Service*, the U.S. District Court of Colorado found that it was "arbitrary and capricious to quantify the *benefits* of the lease modifications and then explain that a similar analysis of the *costs* was impossible when such an analysis was in fact possible."[43] The court explained that, to support a decision on coal mining activity, the agencies had "weighed several specific economic benefits—coal recovered, payroll, associated purchases of supplies and services, and royalties," but arbitrarily failed to monetized climate costs using the readily available social cost of carbon protocol.[44] Similarly, in *Montana Environmental Information Center v. Office of Surface Mining* (*MEIC v. OSM*), the U.S. District Court of Montana followed the lead set by *High Country* and likewise held an environmental assessment to be arbitrary and capricious because it quantified the benefits of action (such as employment payroll, tax revenue, and royalties) while failing to use the social cost of carbon to quantify the costs.[45]

High Country and *MEIC v. OSM* were simply the latest applications of a broader line of case law in which courts find it arbitrary and capricious to apply inconsistent protocols for analyzing some effects compared to others, especially when the inconsistency obscures some of the most significant effects.[46] For example, in *Center for Biological Diversity v. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration*, the U.S.

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[40] *See* 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(B) (requiring agencies to "identify and develop methods and procedures . . . which will insure that presently unquantified environmental amenities and values may be given appropriate consideration in decisionmaking along with economic and technical considerations").

[41] 40 C.F.R. § 1502.23 ("[T]he weighing of the merits and drawbacks of the various alternatives need not be displayed in a monetary cost-benefit analysis."); *but see e.g.*, *Sierra Club v. Sigler*, 695 F.2d 957, 978-79 (5th Cir. 1983) (holding that NEPA "mandates at least a broad, informal cost-benefit analysis," and so agencies must "fully and accurately" and "objectively" assess environmental, economic, and technical costs); *Chelsea Neighborhood Ass'ns v. U.S. Postal Serv.*, 516 F.2d 378, 387 (2d Cir. 1975) ("NEPA, in effect, requires a broadly defined cost-benefit analysis of major federal activities."); *Calvert Cliffs' Coordinating Comm. v. U.S. Atomic Energy Comm'n*, 449 F.2d 1109, 1113 (D.C. Cir. 1971) ("NEPA mandates a rather finely tuned and 'systematic' balancing analysis" of "environmental costs" against "economic and technical benefits"); *Nat'l Wildlife Fed. v. Marsh*, 568 F. Supp. 985, 1000 (D.D.C. 1983) ("The cost-benefit analysis of NEPA is concerned primarily with environmental costs. . . . A court may examine the cost-benefit analysis only as it bears upon the function of insuring that the agency has examined the environmental consequences of a proposed project.").

[42] *High Country Conservation Advocates*, 52 F. Supp. 3d at 1191; *accord. MEIC v. Office of Surface Mining*, 274 F. Supp. 3d at 1094-99 (holding it was arbitrary for the agency to quantify benefits in an EIS while failing to use the social cost of carbon to quantify costs, as well as arbitrary to imply there would be no effects from greenhouse gas emissions).

[43] 52 F. Supp. 3d at 1191.

[44] *Id.*

[45] 274 F. Supp. 3d at 1094-99 (also holding that it was arbitrary to imply that there would be zero effects from greenhouse gas emissions).

[46] Other cases from different courts that have declined to rule against failures to use the social cost of carbon in NEPA analyses are all distinguishable by the scale of the action or by whether other effects were quantified and monetized in the analysis. *See League of Wilderness Defenders v. Connaughton*, No. 3:12-cv-02271-HZ (D. Ore., Dec. 9, 2014*); EarthReports v. FERC*, 15-1127, (D.C. Cir. July 15, 2016); *WildEarth Guardians v. Zinke*, 1:16-CV-00605-RJ, at 23-24, (D. N.M. Feb. 16, 2017).

Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that, because the agency had monetized other uncertain costs and benefits of its vehicle fuel efficiency standard—like traffic congestion and noise costs—its "decision not to monetize the benefit of carbon emissions reduction was arbitrary and capricious."[47] Specifically, it was arbitrary to "assign[ ] no value to *the most significant benefit* of more stringent [vehicle fuel efficiency] standards: reduction in carbon emissions."[48] When an agency bases a decision on cost-benefit analysis, it is arbitrary to "put a thumb on the scale by undervaluing the benefits and overvaluing the costs."[49] Similarly, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit has chastised agencies for "inconsistently and opportunistically fram[ing] the costs and benefits of the rule [and] fail[ing] adequately to quantify certain costs or to explain why those costs could not be quantified"[50]; and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit has remanded an environmental impact statement because "unrealistic" assumptions "misleading[ly]" skewed comparison of the project's positive and negative effects.[51]

Though these EAs may not directly monetize economic benefits, they all tier to older Resource Management Plans or other documents that do. For example, the Rio Puerco EA tiers to the 1991 Albuquerque District RMPA and ROD,[52] which had monetized the proposed alternative's total resource value, royalties, revenue, and wage increases.[53] BLM seemingly tries to skirt the precedent set by *MEIC v. OSM* by identifying these economic benefits as "economic impacts." The EAs reads, "[a]ny increased economic activity…that is expected to occur with the proposed action is simply an economic impact, rather than an economic benefit."[54] However, in *MEIC v. OSM*, the District Court of the District of Montana dismissed this same argument as "a distinction without a difference."[55] Despite BLM's attempts to use terminology to distinguish the impacts it wants to monetize from those impacts it would prefer not to monetize, NEPA regulations group all these impacts under the same category of "effects": economic and social impacts are listed as "effects" alongside ecological and health impacts, and all these effects must be discussed in as much detail as possible in an environmental impact statement.[56]

Moreover, the economic benefits in the tiered RMPs do, in fact, capture social benefits of fossil fuel development. Specifically, the calculations of total resource value rely on the estimated market value of these fossil fuels to be recovered under the RMPs. In a competitive market, like for oil or gas, the market price reflects aggregate willingness to pay based on social utility. Therefore, in calculating total resource value, BLM has presented a monetized estimate of the supposed social benefits of the fossil fuel development under the proposed leases. Consequently, BLM must also use readily available tools to monetize the social costs of the fossil fuel development. It is arbitrary to apply inconsistent protocols for analysis of some effects compared to others, and to monetize some effects but not others that are equally monetizable.

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[47] 538 F.3d 1172, 1203 (9th Cir. 2008).

[48] *Id.* at 1199.

[49] *Id.* at 1198.

[50] *Bus. Roundtable v. SCC*, 647 F.3d 1144, 1148-49 (D.C. Cir. 2011)

[51] *Johnston v. Davis*, 698 F.2d 1088, 1094–95 (10th Cir. 1983)

[52] DOI-BLM-NM-A010-2019-0030-EA at 11.

[53] https://archive.org/details/albuquerquedistrunit/page/n153 at 4-40.

[54] E.g., DOI-BLM-NM-A010-2019-0030-EA at 66.

[55] *Supra* note 42 at 40.

[56] 40 C.F.R. §1508.8.

II. The Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas Metric Is Appropriate for a Program with Emissions of this Magnitude

The EAs claim that the social cost of greenhouse gas methodology is not appropriate for use outside of the rulemaking context and "does not measure the actual incremental impacts of a project on the environment."[57] These arguments are wrong, as other agencies have recently acknowledged.[58] The social cost of greenhouse gas protocol is exactly such a tool to monetize the incremental climate impacts of specific programs, projects, or plans, and its use is not limited to rulemakings.

The EAs also argue that "the dollar cost figure [from using the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics] is generated in a range and provides little benefit in assisting the authorized officer's decision for program or project-level analyses."[59] Yet numerous other agencies have had no trouble applying the manageable range of estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases to assess the significance of the climate impacts of their actions. NEPA requires BLM to use its judgment and available tools, and the agency cannot use uncertainty as a red herring to escape its statutory obligations.

Monetization Is Appropriate and Useful in Any Decision with Significant Climate Impacts, Not Just Regulations

Though the federal Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases originally developed its estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases to harmonize the metrics used by agencies in their various regulatory impact analyses, there is nothing in the numbers' development that would limit applications to other decisionmaking contexts. The social cost of greenhouse gases measures the marginal cost of any additional unit of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere. The government action that precipitated that unit of emissions—a regulation, the granting of a permit, or a project approval—is irrelevant to the marginal climate damages caused by the emissions. Whether emitted by a leaking pipeline or the extraction process, whether emitted because of a regulation or a resource management decision, whether emitted in Alaska or Maine, the marginal climate damages per unit of emissions remain the same. Indeed, the social cost of greenhouse gases has been used by many federal and state agencies in environmental impact reviews[60] and in resource management decisions.[61]

The Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas Metrics Provides a Tool to Assess the Significance of Individual Physical Impacts

The social cost of greenhouse gas methodology is well suited to measure the marginal climate damages of individual projects. These protocols were developed to assess the cost of actions with "marginal"

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[57] *E.g.*, DOI-BLM-NM-A010-2019-0030-EA at 66-67.

[58] *E.g.,* the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has recently disclaimed this argument as a reason not to use the social cost of carbon, admitting that "[o]n further review, we accept that the Social Cost of Carbon methodology does constitute a tool that can be used to estimate incremental physical climate change impacts." [SMP Remand Order at P 48.]

[59] *E.g.*, DOI-BLM-NM-A010-2019-0030-EA at 67.

[60] For example, in August 2017, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management called the social cost of carbon "a useful measure to assess the benefits of CO2 reductions and inform agency decisions," and applied the metric in an environmental impact statement to monetize the emissions difference of about 5 million metric tons per year between the proposed oil and gas development project and the no-action baseline, *Draft Environmental Impact Statement—Liberty Development Project in the Beaufort Sea, Alaska* at 3-129, 4-50 (2017). More generally, agencies have used IWG's social cost of greenhouse gas estimates not only in scores of rulemakings but also in NEPA analyses for resource management decisions. *See* Peter Howard & Jason Schwartz, *Think Global: International Reciprocity as Justification for a Global Social Cost of Carbon*, 42 Columbia J. Envtl. L. 203, 270-84 (2017) (listing all uses by federal agencies through July 2016).

[61] States have used the social cost of greenhouse gases in decisions about electricity planning. *See* Iliana Paul et al., *The Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases and State Policy: A Frequently Asked Questions Guide* (Policy Integrity Report, 2017), http://policyintegrity.org/files/publications/SCC_State_Guidance.pdf.

impacts on cumulative global emissions, and the metrics estimate the dollar figure of damages for one extra unit of greenhouse gas emissions. This marginal cost is calculated using integrated assessment models. These models translate emissions into changes in atmospheric greenhouse concentrations, atmospheric concentrations into changes in temperature, and changes in temperature into economic damages. A range of plausible socio-economic and emissions trajectories are used to account for the scope of potential scenarios and circumstances that may actually result in the coming years and decades. The marginal cost is attained by first running the models using a baseline emissions trajectory, and then running the same models again with one additional unit of emissions. The difference in damages between the two runs is the marginal cost of one additional unit. The approach assumes that the marginal damages from increased emissions will remain constant for small emissions increases relative to gross global emissions. In other words, the monetization tools are in fact perfectly suited to measuring the marginal effects of individual projects or other discrete agency actions. Similarly, BLM is wrong to suggest that the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics are appropriate only "to estimate impacts of regulation over long time frames."[62] The metrics estimate the additional climate damages caused by a single ton of greenhouse gases emitted in a single year.[63]

Some of the incremental impacts on the environment that the social cost of greenhouse gas protocol captures—and which the EAs fail to meaningfully analyze—include property lost or damaged; impacts to agriculture, forestry, and fisheries; impacts to human health; changes in fresh water availability; ecosystem service impacts; impacts to outdoor recreation and other non-market amenities; and some catastrophic impacts, including potentially rapid sea-level rise, damages at very high temperatures, or unknown events.[64] A key advantage of using the social cost of greenhouse gas tool is that each physical impact—such as sea-level rise and increasing temperatures—need not be assessed in isolation. Instead, the social cost of greenhouse gas tool conveniently groups together the multitude of climate impacts and, consistent with NEPA regulations,[65] enables agencies to assess whether all those impacts are cumulatively significant and to then compare those impacts with other impacts or alternatives using a common metric.

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[62] E.g., DOI-BLM-NM-A010-2019-0030-EA at 67.

[63] Because greenhouse gases have long lifespans, the metrics aggregate the climate effects that a single ton of greenhouse gases emitted in a single year will cause over its entire and long life; but that does not change the fact that the climate effects from a single ton emitted in a single year can be monetized.

[64] These impacts are all included to some degree in the three integrated assessment models (IAMs) used by the IWG (namely, the DICE, FUND, and PAGE models), though some impacts are modeled incompletely, and many other important damage categories are currently omitted from these IAMs. *Compare* Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Carbon, *Technical Support Document: Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis* at 6-8, 29-33 (2010), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/for-agencies/Social-Cost-of-Carbon-for-RIA.pdf [hereinafter 2010 TSD]; *with* Peter Howard, *Omitted Damages: What's Missing from the Social Cost of Carbon* (Cost of Carbon Project Report, 2014), http://costofcarbon.org/files/Omitted_Damages_Whats_Missing_From_the_Social_Cost_of_Carbon.pdf. For other lists of actual climate effects, including air quality mortality, extreme temperature mortality, lost labor productivity, harmful algal blooms, spread of west nile virus, damage to roads and other infrastructure, effects on urban drainage, damage to coastal property, electricity demand and supply effects, water supply and quality effects, inland flooding, lost winter recreation, effects on agriculture and fish, lost ecosystem services from coral reefs, and wildfires, *see* EPA, *Multi-Model Framework for Quantitative Sectoral Impacts Analysis: A Technical Report for the Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017); U.S. Global Change Research Program, *Climate Science Special Report: Fourth National Climate Assessment* (2017); EPA, *Climate Change in the United States: Benefits of Global Action* (2015); Union of Concerned Scientists, *Underwater: Rising Seas, Chronic Floods, and the Implications for U.S. Coastal Real Estate* (2018).

[65] 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(7) (explaining that actions can be significant if related to individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts).

Omitted Categories of Damages Should Be Discussed Qualitatively

BLM faults the social cost of carbon for failing to include "all damages or benefits from carbon emissions."[66] Alleged benefits of carbon emissions, such as from increased fertilization, are in fact already included in the IWG's estimates and are probably even overstated in those estimates. Many of the assumptions about climate benefits built into the integrated assessment models used by the IWG are now outdated; for example, recent work demonstrates that the benefits to agriculture from climate change assumed by the developers of FUND are, in fact, far lower.[67] Other research has also shown that the predicted amenity benefits from climate change, like agricultural benefits, are also highly controversial.[68]

As for omitted damages, there certainly are key damages, including catastrophic outcomes, that are not yet fully monetized in the IWG's social cost of greenhouse gas estimates. In fact, one reason that IWG published not only "central" estimates but also estimates from the 95th percentile of the distribution was to reflect that omitted damage categories could significantly increase the estimates. As noted above, the social cost of greenhouse gases should be seen as a conservative lower-bound estimate of the greenhouse gas impacts. Even while this metric represents the best and most rigorous effort that the U.S. government has engaged in thus far to realistically quantify the impacts of these emissions, it is very likely to underrepresent the true extent of those impacts. Indeed, we strongly encourage further efforts to make the social cost of greenhouse gases more robust.

Nevertheless, the fact that this metric does not capture the entire scope of greenhouse gas impacts does *not* mean that federal agencies should not use it. Rather, agencies should qualitatively discuss any significant omitted category of costs or benefits while continuing to use the IWG estimates as a lower bound of the costs of greenhouse gas emissions.[69]

III. BLM Should Use the Interagency Working Group's 2016 Estimates of the Social Cost of Carbon and the Social Cost of Methane

In 2016, the IWG published updated central estimates for the social cost of greenhouse gases: $50 per ton of carbon dioxide, $1440 per ton of methane, and $18,000 per ton of nitrous oxide (in 2017 dollars for year 2020 emissions).[70] Agencies must continue to use estimates of a similar or higher[71] value in their analyses and decisionmaking. A recent Executive Order disbanding the IWG does not change the fact that the IWG estimates still reflect the best available data and methodologies.

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[66] *E.g.*, DOI-BLM-NM-A010-2019-0030-EA at 67.

[67] F.C. Moore et al., *New science of climate change impacts on agriculture implies higher social cost of carbon*, 8 Nature Communications 1607 (2017).

[68] Howard, *Omitted Damages, supra* note 9; W.M. Hannemann, *What Is the Economic Cost of Climate Change?* (2008); D. Maddison & K. Rehdanz, *The impact of climate on life satisfaction*, 70 Ecological Economics 2437-2445 (2011); K. Rehdanz & D. Maddison, *Climate and happiness*, 52 Ecological Economics 111-125 (2005).

[69] Howard and Sylvan (2015) and Pindyck (2016) find that that the general consensus is that damages are much higher than IAMs currently show, and as a consequence, so are their corresponding SCC estimates.

[70] U.S. Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, "Technical support document: Technical update of the social cost of carbon for regulatory impact analysis under executive order 12866 & Addendum: Application of the methodology to estimate the social cost of methane and the social cost of nitrous oxide" (2016), available at https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/oira/social-cost-of-carbon.

[71] See, e.g., Richard L. Revesz et al., Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change, 508 NATURE 173 (2014) (explaining that current estimates omit key damage categories and, therefore, are very likely underestimates).

IWG's Methodology Is Rigorous, Transparent, and Based on Best Available Data

Beginning in 2009, the IWG assembled experts from a dozen federal agencies and White House offices to "estimate the monetized damages associated with an incremental increase in carbon emissions in a given year" based on "a defensible set of input assumptions that are grounded in the existing scientific and economic literature."[72] IWG's methods combined three frequently used models built to predict the economic costs of the physical impacts of each additional ton of carbon.[73] The models together incorporate such damage categories as: agricultural and forestry impacts, coastal impacts due to sea level rise, impacts from extreme weather events, impacts to vulnerable market sectors, human health impacts including malaria and pollution, outdoor recreation impacts and other non-market amenities, impacts to human settlements and ecosystems, and some catastrophic impacts.[74] IWG ran these models using a baseline scenario including inputs and assumptions drawn from the peer-reviewed literature, and then ran the models again with an additional unit of carbon emissions to determine the increased economic damages.[75] IWG's social cost of carbon estimates were first issued in 2010 and have been updated several times to reflect the latest and best scientific and economic data.[76]

Following the development of estimates for carbon dioxide, the same basic methodology was used in 2016 to develop the social cost of methane and social cost of nitrous oxide—estimates that captures the distinct heating potential of methane and nitrous oxide emissions.[77] These additional metrics used the same economic models, the same treatment of uncertainty, and the same methodological assumptions that IWG applied to the social cost of carbon, and these new estimates underwent rigorous peer-review.[78]

IWG's methodology has been repeatedly endorsed by reviewers. In 2014, the U.S. Government Accountability Office concluded that IWG had followed a "consensus-based" approach, relied on peer-reviewed academic literature, disclosed relevant limitations, and adequately planned to incorporate new information through public comments and updated research.[79] In 2016 and 2017, the National Academies of Sciences issued two reports that, while recommending future improvements to the methodology, supported the continued use of the existing IWG estimates.[80] And in 2016, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit held that the Department of Energy's reliance on IWG's social cost of

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[72] IWG, *Technical Support Document: Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis Under Executive Order 12866* (2010) ("2010 TSD"). *Available at* https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/for-agencies/Social-Cost-of-Carbon-for-RIA.pdf.

[73] *Id.* at 5. These models are DICE (the Dynamic Integrated Model of Climate and the Economy), FUND (the Climate Framework for Uncertainty, Negotiation, and Distribution), and PAGE (Policy Analysis of the Greenhouse Effect).

[74] *Id.* at 6-8.

[75] *Id.* at 24-25.

[76] IWG, *Technical Update of the Social Cost of Carbon* at 5–29 (2016). *Available at* https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/ scc_tsd_final_clean_8_26_16.pdf.

[77] *See* 2016 IWG Addendum at 2.

[78] *Id.* at 3.

[79] Gov't Accountability Office, *Regulatory Impact Analysis: Development of Social Cost of Carbon Estimates* 12-19 (2014). Available at http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/665016.pdf.

[80] Nat'l Acad. Sci., Engineering & Med., *Valuing Climate Damages: Updating Estimation of the Social Cost of Carbon Dioxide* 3 (2017), https://www.nap.edu/read/24651/chapter/1; Nat'l Acad. Sci., Engineering & Med., *Assessment of Approaches to Updating the Social Cost of Carbon: Phase 1 Report on a Near-Term Update* 1–2 (2016); https://www.nap.edu/read/21898/chapter/1.

carbon was reasonable.[81] It is, therefore, unsurprising that leading economists and climate policy experts have endorsed the Working Group's values as the best available estimates.[82]

BLM asserts that the "range" of estimates reported by the Interagency Working Group is perhaps too wide and so "provides little benefit in assisting the authorized officer's decision for program or project-level analyses."[83] Not only was this line of thinking rejected by the Ninth Circuit in *Center for Biological Diversity*—"while . . . there is a range of values, the value of carbon emissions reduction is certainly not zero"[84]—but the range of values recommended by the Interagency Working Group[85] and endorsed by the National Academies of Sciences[86] is rather manageable. In 2016, the IWG recommended values at discount rates from 2.5% to 5%, calculated as between $12 and $62 for year 2020 emissions.[87] Numerous federal agencies have had no difficulty either applying this range in their environmental impact statements or else focusing on the central estimate at a 3% discount rate.[88] Most recently, in August 2017, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management applied the IWG's range of estimates calculated at three discount rates (2.5%, 3%, and 5%) to its environmental impact statement for an offshore oil development plan,[89] and called this range of estimates "a useful measure to assess the benefits of CO_2 reductions and inform agency decisions."[90]

Here, BLM complains that, for example, applying the IWG's range of estimates of the social cost of carbon to a "recent environmental impact statement" would have shown a difference between the selected alternative and the no-action alternative of somewhere between $2.2 billion and $11.4 billion in climate damages[91]—yet far from being such a wide "range" as to "provide little benefit," these calculations show that, in this example, the proposed action caused *at least $2.2 billion in climate damages, and not $0.* BLM is responsible under NEPA to exercise its judgment and meaningfully analyze the significance of the climate impacts of its actions; it may not appeal to innumeracy as an excuse for ignoring significant climate effects.

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[81] *Zero Zone,* 832 F.3d at 679.

[82] See, e.g., Richard Revesz et al., *Best Cost Estimate of Greenhouse Gases*, 357 Science 655 (2017); Michael Greenstone et al., *Developing a Social Cost of Carbon for U.S. Regulatory Analysis: A Methodology and Interpretation*, 7 Rev. Envtl. Econ. & Pol'y 23, 42 (2013); Richard L. Revesz et al., *Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change*, 508 Nature 173 (2014) (co-authored with Nobel Laureate Kenneth Arrow, among others).

[83] E.g., DOI-BLM-NM-A010-2019-0030-EA at 67.

[84] 538 F.3d at 1200.

[85] *See* Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, *Technical Update* (2016) (hereinafter 2016 TSD).

[86] *See* National Academies of Sciences, *Assessment of Approaches to Updating the Social Cost of Carbon* (2016) (hereinafter First NAS Report) (endorsing continued near-term use of the IWG numbers; in 2017, the NAS recommended moving to a declining discount rate, *see* National Academies of Sciences, *Valuing Climate Damages* (2017) (hereinafter Second NAS Report).

[87] 2016 TSD. The values given here are in 2007$. The IWG also recommended a 95th percentile value of $123.

[88] BLM, *Envtl. Assessment—Waste Prevention, Prod. Subject to Royalties, and Res. Conservation* at 52 (2016); BLM, *Final Envtl. Assessment: Little Willow Creek Protective Oil and Gas Lease*, DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2014-0036-EA, at 82 (2015); Office of Surface Mining, *Final Envtl. Impact Statement—Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine Energy Project* at 4.2-26 to 4.2-27 (2015) (explaining the social cost of greenhouse gases "provide[s] further context and enhance[s] the discussion of climate change impacts in the NEPA analysis."); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Draft Envtl. Impact Statement for the Missouri River Recovery Mgmt. Project* at 3-335 (2016); U.S. Forest Serv., *Rulemaking for Colorado Roadless Areas: Supplemental Final Envtl. Impact Statement* at 120-123 (Nov. 2016) (using both the social cost of carbon and social cost of methane relating to coal leases); NHTSA EIS, *Available at* http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/rulemaking/pdf/cafe/FINAL_EIS.pdf at 9-77.

[89] BOEM, *Liberty Development Project: Draft Environmental Impact Statement*, at 4-247 (2017).

[90] *Id.* at 3-129.

[91] E.g., DOI-BLM-NM-A010-2019-0030-EA at 67.

A Recent Executive Order Does Not Change the Requirements to Monetize Climate Damages

In March 2017, President Trump disbanded the IWG and withdrew their technical support documents.[92] Nevertheless, Executive Order 13,783 assumes that federal agencies will continue to "monetiz[e] the value of changes in greenhouse gas emissions" and instructs agencies to ensure such estimates are "consistent with the guidance contained in OMB Circular A-4."[93] Consequently, while federal agencies no longer benefit from ongoing technical support from the IWG on use of the social cost of greenhouse gases, by no means does the new Executive Order imply that agencies should not monetize important effects in their environmental impact statements. The Executive Order does not prohibit agencies from relying on the same choice of models as the IWG, the same inputs and assumptions as the IWG, the same statistical methodologies as the IWG, or the same ultimate values as derived by the IWG. To the contrary, because the Executive Order requires consistency with Circular A-4, as agencies follow the Circular's standards for using the best available data and methodologies, they will necessarily choose similar data, methodologies, and estimates as the IWG, since the IWG's work continues to represent the best available estimates.[94] The Executive Order does not preclude agencies from using the same range of estimates as developed by the IWG, so long as the agency explains that the data and methodology that produced those estimates are consistent with Circular A-4 and, more broadly, with standards for rational decisionmaking.

Similarly, the Executive Order's withdrawal of the Council on Environmental Quality's guidance on greenhouse gases,[95] does not—and legally cannot—remove agencies' statutory requirement to fully disclose the environmental impacts of greenhouse gas emissions. As the Council on Environmental Quality explained in its withdrawal, the "guidance was not a regulation," and "[t]he withdrawal of the guidance does not change any law, regulation, or other legally binding requirement."[96] In other words, when the guidance originally recommended the appropriate use of the social cost of greenhouse gases in environmental impact statements,[97] it was simply explaining that the social cost of greenhouse gases is consistent with longstanding NEPA regulations and case law, all of which are still in effect today.

Notably, some agencies under the Trump administration have continued to use the IWG estimates even following the Executive Order. For example, in August 2017, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management called the social cost of carbon "a useful measure" and applied it to analyze the consequences of offshore oil and gas drilling.[98] And in July 2017, the Department of Energy used the IWG's estimates for carbon and methane emissions to analyze energy efficiency regulation, describing the social cost of methane as having "undergone multiple stages of peer review."[99]

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[92] Exec. Order No. 13,783 § 5(b), 82 Fed. Reg. 16,093 (Mar. 28, 2017).

[93] *Id.* § 5(c).

[94] *See* Richard L. Revesz et al., *Best Cost Estimate of Greenhouse Gases*, 357 SCIENCE 6352 (2017) (explaining that, even after Trump's Executive Order, the social cost of greenhouse gas estimate of around $50 per ton of carbon dioxide is still the best estimate).

[95] Exec. Order 13,783 § 3(c)

[96] 82 Fed. Reg. 16,576, 16,576 (Apr. 5, 2017).

[97] *See* CEQ, *Revised Draft Guidance on Consideration of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Effects of Climate Change in National Environmental Policy Act Reviews* at 16 (Dec. 2014), *available at* https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nepa_revised_draft_ghg_guidance_searchable.pdf ("[A]lthough developed specifically for regulatory impact analyses, the Federal social cost of carbon, which multiple Federal agencies have developed and used to assess the costs and benefits of alternatives in rulemakings, offers a harmonized, interagency metric that can provide decisionmakers and the public with some context for meaningful NEPA review.").

[98] *Draft Environmental Impact Statement—Liberty Development Project in the Beaufort Sea, Alaska* at 3-129.

[99] Energy Conservation Program: Energy Conservation Standards for Walk-In Cooler and Freezer Refrigeration Systems, 82 Fed. Reg. 31,808, 31,811, 31,857 (July 10, 2017).

Two agencies have developed new "interim" values of the social cost of greenhouse gases following the Executive Order. Relying on faulty economic theory, these "interim" estimates drop the social cost of carbon from $50 per ton in year 2020 down to as little as $1 per ton, and drop the social cost of methane from $1420 per ton in year 2020 down to $58. These "interim" estimates are inconsistent with accepted science and economics; the IWG's 2016 estimates remain the best available estimates. The IWG's methodology and estimates have been repeatedly endorsed by reviewers as transparent, consensus-based, and firmly grounded in the academic literature. By contrast, the "interim" estimates ignore the interconnected, global nature of our climate-vulnerable economy, and obscure the devastating effects that climate change will have on younger and future generations. BLM should not use the "interim" social cost of greenhouse gas estimates because of their methodological flaws, as described more fully in the attached comments which we have previously submitted to BLM on its misleading use of the unsupported "interim" values.

Uncertainty Supports Higher Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas Estimates, and Is Never a Reason to Abandon the Metric

BLM has complained that the range of social cost of carbon estimates is too large and uncertain to be helpful. In fact, it would be much more misleading to not monetize climate damages at all and so risk treating them as worthless. More generally, uncertainty is *not* a reason to abandon the social cost of greenhouse gas methodologies;[100] quite the contrary, uncertainty supports higher estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases, because most uncertainties regarding climate change entail tipping points, catastrophic risks, and unknown unknowns about the damages of climate change. Because the key uncertainties of climate change include the risk of irreversible catastrophes, applying an options value framework to the regulatory context strengthens the case for ambitious regulatory action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

There are numerous well-established, rigorous analytical tools available to help agencies characterize and quantitatively assess uncertainty, such as Monte Carlo simulations, and the IWG's social cost of greenhouse gas protocol incorporates those tools. To further deal with uncertainty, the IWG recommended to agencies a range of four estimates: three central or mean-average estimates at a 2.5%, 3%, and 5% discount rate respectively, and a 95th percentile value at the 3% discount rate. While the IWG's technical support documents disclosed fuller probabilities distributions, these four estimates were chosen by agencies to be the focus for decisionmaking. In particular, application of the 95th percentile value was not part of an effort to show the probability distribution around the 3% discount rate; rather, the 95th percentile value serves as a methodological shortcut to approximate the uncertainties around low-probability but high-damage, catastrophic, or irreversible outcomes that are currently omitted or undercounted in the economic models.

The shape of the distribution of climate risks and damages includes a long tail of lower-probability, high-damage, irreversible outcomes due to "tipping points" in planetary systems, inter-sectoral interactions, and other deep uncertainties. Climate damages are not normally distributed around a central estimate, but rather feature a significant right skew toward catastrophic outcomes. In fact, a 2015 survey of economic experts concludes that catastrophic outcomes are increasingly likely to occur.[101] Because the

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[100] *Center for Biological Diversity v. NHTSA*, 538 F.3d 1172, 1200 (9th Cir. 2008) ("[W]hile the record shows that there is a range of values, the value of carbon emissions reductions is certainly not zero.").

[101] Policy Integrity, *Expert Consensus on the Economics of Climate Change* 2 (2015), *available at* http://policyintegrity.org/files/publications/ExpertConsensusReport.pdf [hereinafter *Expert Consensus*] ("Experts believe that there is greater than a 20% likelihood that this same climate scenario would lead to a 'catastrophic' economic impact (defined as a global GDP loss of 25% or more)."). *See also* Robert Pindyck, *The Social Cost of Carbon Revisited* (National Bureau of Economic Research, No. w22807, 2016).

three integrated assessment models that the IWG's methodology relied on are unable to systematically account for these potential catastrophic outcomes, a 95th percentile value was selected instead to account for such uncertainty. There are no similarly systematic biases pointing in the other direction which might warrant giving weight to a low-percentile estimate.

Additionally, the 95th percentile value addresses the strong possibility of widespread risk aversion with respect to climate change. The integrated assessment models do not reflect that individuals likely have a higher willingness to pay to reduce low-probability, high-impact damages than they do to reduce the likelihood of higher-probability but lower impact damages with the same expected cost. Beyond individual members of society, governments also have reasons to exercise some degree of risk aversion to irreversible outcomes like climate change.

The National Academies of Sciences did recommend that the IWG document its full treatment of uncertainty in an appendix and disclose low-probability as well as high-probability estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases.[102] However, that does not mean it would be appropriate for individual agencies to rely on low-percentile estimates to justify decisions. While disclosing low-percentile estimates as a sensitivity analysis may promote transparency, relying on such an estimate for decisionmaking—in the face of contrary guidance from the best available science and economics on uncertainty and risk—would not be a "credible, objective, realistic, and scientifically balanced" approach to uncertainty, as required by Circular A-4.[103]

In short, the 95th percentile estimate attempts to capture risk aversion and uncertainties around lower-probability, high-damage, irreversible outcomes that are currently omitted or undercounted by the models. There is no need to balance out this estimate with a low-percentile value, because the reverse assumptions are not reasonable:

- There is no reason to believe the public or the government will be systematically risk seeking with respect to climate change.[104]
- The consequences of overestimating the risk of climate damages (i.e., spending more than we need to on mitigation and adaptation) are not nearly as irreversible as the consequences of underestimating the risk of climate damage (i.e., failing to prevent catastrophic outcomes).
- Though some uncertainties might point in the direction of lower social cost of greenhouse gas values, such as those related to the development of breakthrough adaptation technologies, the models already account for such uncertainties around adaptation; on balance, most uncertainties strongly point toward higher, not lower, social cost of greenhouse gas estimates.[105]

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[102] Nat'l Acad. Of Sci., *Assessment of Approaches to Updating the Social Cost of Carbon* 49 (2016) ("[T]he IWG could identify a high percentile (e.g., 90th, 95th) and corresponding low percentile (e.g., 10th, 5th) of the SCC frequency distributions on each graph.").

[103] Circular A-4 at 39.

[104] As a 2009 survey revealed, the vast majority of economic experts support the idea that "uncertainty associated with the environmental and economic effects of greenhouse gas emissions increases the value of emission controls, assuming some level of risk-aversion." *See Expert Consensus, supra* note 101, at 3 (citing 2009 survey).

[105] *See* Richard L. Revesz et al., *Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change*, 508 NATURE 173 (2014). R. Tol, *The Social Cost of Carbon*, 3 Annual Rev. Res. Econ. 419 (2011) ("[U]ndesirable surprises seem more likely than desirable surprises. Although it is relatively easy to imagine a disaster scenario for climate change—for example, involving massive sea

- There is no empirical basis for any "long tail" of potential benefits that would counteract the potential for extreme harm associated with climate change.

Moreover, even the best existing estimates of the social cost of greenhouse gases are likely underestimated because the models currently omit many significant categories of damages—such as depressed economic growth, pests, pathogens, erosion, air pollution, fire, dwindling energy supply, health costs, political conflict, and ocean acidification, as well as tipping points, catastrophic risks, and unknown unknowns—and because of other methodological choices.[106]

Consequently, uncertainty suggests an even higher social cost of greenhouse gases and so is not a reason to abandon the metric, which would misleadingly suggest that climate damages are worthless.

Sincerely,

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*No part of this document purports to present New York University School of Law's views, if any.

Attachments:

Joint Comments to BLM on the Failure to Appropriately Value the Social Cost of Methane in the Rescission or Revision of Certain Requirements for Waste Prevention and Resource Conservation

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level rise or monsoon failure that could even lead to mass migration and violent conflict—it is not at all easy to imagine that climate change will be a huge boost to human welfare.").

[106] *See* Revesz et al., *Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change*, *supra* note 105; Peter Howard, *Omitted Damages: What's Missing from the Social Cost of Carbon* (Cost of Carbon Project Report, 2014); Frances C. Moore & Delavane B. Diaz, *Temperature Impacts on Economic Growth Warrant Stringent Mitigation Policy*, 5 NATURE CLIMATE CHANGE 127 (2015) (demonstrating SCC may be biased downward by more than a factor of six by failing to include the climate's effect on economic growth).