

Institute for
Policy Integrity

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

March 9, 2020

To: Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
Subject: Failure to Quantify and Monetize Downstream Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Acadiana Project and Louisiana Xpress Project South Project Environmental Assessment
Docket Nos.: CP19-484-000 and CP19-488-000

The Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University School of Law (“Policy Integrity”)¹ respectfully submits comments on the Environmental Assessment for the Acadiana Project and Louisiana Xpress Project (Docket Nos. CP19-484-000 and CP19-488-000).² Policy Integrity is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to improving the quality of government decisionmaking through advocacy and scholarship in the fields of administrative law, economics, and public policy. Policy Integrity regularly submits comments to federal agencies on the social cost of greenhouse gases and assessments under the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”).

The EA covers the Acadiana and Louisiana Xpress projects, submitted by two applicants, Kinder Morgan Louisiana Pipeline LLC (“KMLP”) and Columbia Gulf Transmission, LLC (“Columbia Gulf”), which would include construction, operation, and maintenance of natural gas facilities, including compressor stations, in Louisiana. The Louisiana Xpress Project will provide 800 thousand dekatherms of new transportation capacity, and the Acadiana Project will provide 849 additional dekatherms of capacity.³ As simple arithmetic reveals, if this entire additional capacity of natural gas were consumed through combustion, it would generate 87.25 thousand metric tons of greenhouse gases on a daily basis,⁴ or 31.85 million tons annually.

Yet such projections of emissions from combustion are nowhere to be found in the EA, as FERC fails to disclose the potential downstream emissions from these projects. However, 31.85 million tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent in annual emissions is a substantial amount that will contribute to numerous adverse climate impacts, including environmental, economic, and public health harms. While NEPA requires FERC to disclose and assess the significance of the projects’ contributions to such actual environmental impacts—and an available tool, the social cost of greenhouse gases metric, allows the agency to do exactly that—the EA fails to estimate such actual, real-world climate impacts.

¹ This document does not purport to represent New York University School of Law’s views, if any.

² FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATION COMMISSION., ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR ACADIANA PROJECT AND LOUISIANA XPRESS PROJECT (CP19-484-000 AND CP19-488-000) (Feb. 2020) [hereinafter “EA”].

³ *Id.* at 1.

⁴ According to EPA, one dekatherm of natural gas produces 0.053 metric tons of CO₂e emissions. See GHG Equivalencies Calculator, available at <https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator>.

Yet as the social cost metrics reveal, the scenario FERC proposes would result in roughly \$1.8 billion in annual climate costs from downstream emissions alone.⁵

FERC Must Quantify and Monetize Downstream Emissions from the Projects

NEPA requires “hard look” consideration of the potentially significant effects of proposed 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.”⁶ Courts have repeatedly concluded that an environmental impact statement must disclose potentially significant climate effects.⁷ 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.”⁸ 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.”⁹ In order to disclose the actual environmental effects of the projects’ emissions, including from fugitive methane emissions, FERC should use the social cost of greenhouse gases protocols.

Though FERC does disclose nearly 1 million tons of annual emissions from operations,¹⁰ the potential downstream emissions are much larger. As FERC well knows, NEPA at minimum requires agencies to quantify “reasonably foresee[able]” greenhouse gas impacts whenever possible.¹¹ And several courts have gone further, finding that a quantified estimate of greenhouse gas emissions is insufficient when the agency does not also “evaluate the ‘incremental impact’ that these emissions will have on climate change or on the environment more generally” through a monetized estimate of climate damages.¹² Accordingly, without even quantifying the projects’ downstream greenhouse gas emissions, FERC cannot possibly “disclose” their “actual environmental effects.”¹³ If FERC had estimated the projects’ downstream emissions, it would know that they are far greater than the emissions in cases referenced above where courts faulted agencies for failing to evaluate incremental environmental impacts.¹⁴

⁵ 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\$. 31.85 million tons of CO₂e* \$57 = \$1.81 billion. In a proper cost-benefit analysis, that calculation of costs from year 2025 emissions would be discounted back to present value.

⁶ *Baltimore Gas & Elec. Co. v. Natural Res. Def. Council*, 462 U.S. 87, 96 (1983) (emphasis added).

⁷ 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).

⁸ *Ctr. for Biological Diversity*, 538 F.3d at 1194 (citations omitted).

⁹ *Id.* at 1217.

¹⁰ See EA tbls. 22-25

¹¹ *Sierra Club v. Fed. Energy Regulatory Comm’n*, 867 F.3d 1357, 1374 (D.C. Cir. 2017); see also *San Juan Citizens All. v. U.S. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 326 F. Supp. 3d 1227, 1244 (D.N.M. 2018).

¹² *Ctr. for Biological Diversity*, 538 F.3d at 1216; see also, e.g., *High Country Conservation Advocates v. United States Forest Serv.*, 52 F. Supp. 3d 1174, 1191 (D. Colo. 2014).

¹³ *Balt. Gas & Elec. Co.*, 462 U.S. at 96.

¹⁴ *Ctr. for Biological Diversity*, 538 F.3d at 1216 (122–196 million metric tons); *High Country*, 52 F. Supp. 3d at 1191 (1.23 million annually).

By monetizing climate damages using the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics, agencies are able to satisfy NEPA's legal obligations and statutory goals to assess the incremental and actual 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.¹⁵ 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.

FERC Should Use the Social Cost of Methane and Social Cost of Nitrous Oxide in Addition to the Social Cost of Carbon

Even if FERC quantifies and monetizes downstream emissions, it should disclose actual methane and nitrous oxide emissions, rather than providing carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions, and use the social costs of methane and nitrous oxide, in order to provide an accurate picture of the projects' climate impacts.

FERC suggests that it must use the "100-year GWP timeline" to convert methane and nitrous oxide emissions into carbon dioxide-equivalents to ensure that consistent comparisons could be made across Federal agency estimates and data. Specifically, FERC says it has "selected [GWPs based on a 100-year time period] over other published GWPs for other timeframes because these are the GWPs the EPA has established for reporting of GHG emissions and air permitting requirements. This allows for a consistent comparison with these regulatory requirements."¹⁶ However, FERC does not explain why consistency is a more important factor than either accuracy or providing sufficient informational context to inform the public and decisionmakers.

If FERC presents the projects' greenhouse gas emissions in aggregate sums of carbon dioxide-equivalent units, the agency should use the latest adjustment factors from the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report: namely, 85-87 for methane and 264-268 for nitrous oxide under a 20-year timeline, and 30-36 for methane and 265-298 for nitrous oxide under a 100-year timeline.¹⁷

But given that, as discussed below, the Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases developed estimates specifically for the social cost of methane and the social cost of nitrous oxide that better account for these gases' unique contributions to climate damages over their lifespan and given their particular atmospheric chemistry, FERC should also disclose the raw tons of methane and nitrous oxide emitted by these oil and gas leases, rather than subsuming these totals into carbon dioxide-equivalent aggregates. Quantifying tons of methane separately will allow for more accurate calculation of the projects' climate damages.

FERC should then use the social cost of methane and the social cost of nitrous oxide—in addition to the social cost of carbon dioxide—developed by the federal Interagency Working Group ("IWG") to

¹⁵ Interagency Working Group, Technical Support for Document: Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis 5 (2010).

¹⁶ EA at 74 n. 8.

¹⁷ IPCC Working Group I, Fifth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis, Chapter 8: Anthropogenic and Natural Radiative Forcing (2014) at 633, 711-712, 714 (Table 8.7), available at https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg1/WG1AR5_Chapter08_FINAL.pdf (see the adjustment identified in note B for fossil methane; 85-87 times greater than carbon after 20 years, and 30-36 times greater after 100 years).

monetize emissions. 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

The most recent IWG central estimates for the social cost of greenhouse gases are about \$52 per ton of carbon dioxide, \$1,480 per ton of methane, and \$18,500 per ton of nitrous oxide (in 2019 dollars for year 2020 emissions).²⁰ Agencies must continue to use estimates of a similar or higher²¹ 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.

Policy Integrity attaches October 2019 joint comments on Failure to Use the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases in the Alaska LNG Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Docket No. CP17-178-000), which elaborates on why FERC should use the social cost of greenhouse gases metric in its NEPA analysis, and hereby incorporates those arguments by reference.

Sincerely,

Jason A. Schwartz, Legal Director
Iliana Paul, Policy Analyst
Max Sarinsky, Legal Fellow

Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University School of Law

Attachment:

Joint Comments on Failure to Use the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases in the Alaska LNG Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement—Docket No. CP17-178-000 (Oct. 3, 2019).

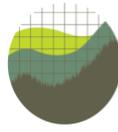
¹⁸ See Addendum to U.S. Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, Technical Support Document: Technical Update of the Social Cost of Carbon for Regulatory Impact Analysis Under Executive Order 12866, at 2 (2016).

¹⁹ *Id.* at 3.

²⁰ *Id.*; 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 (2016). Though these documents present cost values in 2007\$, we have converted those values to 2019\$ using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' consumer price index data, which is available at <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/CUUR0000SA0>. As this data provides, 2007\$ can be converted to 2019\$ by multiplying by approximately 1.233.

²¹ 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).

Attachment



Institute for
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NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW



October 3, 2019

To: Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

Subject: Failure to Use the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases in the Alaska LNG Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement—Docket No. CP17-178-000

Submitted by: Environmental Defense Fund, Institute for Policy Integrity at New York University School of Law, Montana Environmental Information Center, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, Union of Concerned Scientist¹

These comments address the failure of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s environmental assessment of the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation’s Alaska LNG project to provide a meaningful analysis of the pipeline project’s climate effects, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Natural Gas Act (NGA).

The draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), prepared by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), on the Alaska LNG Project, reviews the proposal construct and operate a new gas treatment plant, two transmission lines, a compressor station, and an LNG liquefaction facility and marine terminal.² While the DEIS quantifies the tons of direct greenhouse gas emissions related to this project—up to 15 million metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions per year from operations annually,³ and an additional two million tons from construction⁴—FERC fails to use the social cost of greenhouse gas metric to fully account for the climate effects of these emissions. Had FERC applied the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics to monetize the climate damages of those emissions, decisionmakers and the public would have been informed that the project’s direct carbon emissions will cause hundreds of millions of dollars per year in climate costs, from property damage, lost productivity, premature death, and other quantifiable effects from construction and operations emissions alone.⁵ FERC also fails to consider the downstream greenhouse gas emissions of the project, despite the fact that there are readily available tools for FERC to easily make these estimates.

¹ Our individual organizations may separately submit other comments regarding other aspects of the DEIS.

² FERC, Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Alaska LNG Project at 1-1 (2019) [hereinafter “DEIS”].

³ DEIS at 4-903, 4-913-915, 4-925 (annual gas treatment plant emissions of 6,607,655; annual compressor emissions of 233,785, 206,381, 166,013, and 191, 658; annual heater emissions of 125,201; annual liquefaction emissions of 7,863,113). *See also* DEIS at 4-104 (listing up to 60,792 metric tons of CO₂e emissions from permafrost thaw during the life of the project). The use of FERC’s emissions estimates here does not endorse those estimates as accurate or complete.

⁴ DEIS at 4-897 to 4-901.

⁵ The central estimate for the social cost of carbon for year 2020 emissions is \$42 in 2007\$. Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, *Technical Update of the Social Cost of Carbon 4* (2016). Using the CPI inflation calculator, \$42 in 2007\$ was worth about \$52 in 2018\$. 15 million metric tons * \$52/ton = \$780 million in climate damages for year 2020 emissions. A full analysis of climate damages would account for the facts that the social cost of carbon rises over time, but also that future costs and benefits should be discounted to present value.

FERC recapitulates flawed arguments used in other inadequate NEPA reviews to implicitly explain why the Commission refuses to use the social cost of greenhouse gases metric for the project. Specifically, FERC claims that there is “there is no universally accepted methodology to attribute discrete, quantifiable, physical effects on the environment to the Project’s incremental contribution to GHGs,”⁶ and accordingly, that it is “not able to assess potential GHG-related impacts attributable to this Project” and ultimately is “unable to determine the significance of the Project’s contribution to climate change.”⁷

FERC must assess the real-world climate impacts of its project’s lifecycle emissions, including direct, upstream, and downstream emissions, and the social cost of greenhouse gas methodology is the best available tool for meaningfully weighing the significance of such impacts under both NEPA and the NGA. The draft DEIS arbitrarily rejects the social cost of greenhouse gas methodology, and so FERC has so far fallen short of its obligations under NEPA and the NGA.

I. FERC Should Monetize the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases in its EIS

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, FERC 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 the significance of emissions, FERC violated NEPA.

Section 7 of the Natural Gas Act requires that the construction and operation of all interstate natural gas facilities first obtain a “certificate of public convenience and necessity issued by the Commission authorizing such acts or operations.”⁹ FERC is directed to approve only those certificates that are “or will be required by the present or future public convenience and necessity.”¹⁰ When enacting the Natural Gas Act, Congress determined that the “business of transporting and selling natural gas for ultimate distribution to the public is affected with the public interest.”¹¹ As a result, the public convenience and necessity standard has been interpreted to encompass “all factors bearing on the public interest.”¹² Numerous courts have confirmed that environmental consequences must be considered when evaluating whether certificate application is in the public interest.¹³ By not disclosing the significance of the project’s climate impacts, FERC violated Section 7 of the NGA.

⁶ DEIS at 4-1162.

⁷ DEIS at 4-1162.

⁸ 40 C.F.R. §§ 1508.8(b), 1502.16(a)-(b).

⁹ 15 U.S.C. § 717f(c)(1)(A)

¹⁰ 15 U.S.C. § 717f(e).

¹¹ 15 U.S.C. § 717.

¹² *Atl. Refining Co. v. Pub. Serv. Comm’n of N.Y.*, 360 U.S. 378, 391 (1959).

¹³ *Pub. Utilities Comm’n of State of Cal. v. FERC*, 900 F.2d 269, 281 (D.C. Cir. 1990); *Minisink Residents for Env’tl. Pres. & Safety v. FERC*, 762 F.3d 97, 101 (D.C. Cir. 2014) (“*Minisink*”); *Myersville Citizens for a Rural Cmty. v. FERC*, 783 F.3d 1301, 1307 (D.C. Cir. 2015) (“*Myersville*”); *Sierra Club v. DOE*, 867 F.3d 189, 202 (D.C. Cir. 2017).

Monetizing Climate Damages Fulfills the Obligations and Goals of NEPA and the NGA

When a project 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 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."¹⁴ Courts have repeatedly concluded that an environmental impact statement must disclose relevant climate effects.¹⁵ NEPA requires "a reasonably thorough discussion of the significant aspects of the probable environmental consequences," to "foster both informed decisionmaking and informed public participation."¹⁶ 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."¹⁷ Furthermore, the analyses included in environmental assessments and impact statements "cannot be misleading."¹⁸ 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 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.

Similarly, monetizing climate damages advances the NGA's goals of reasoned decisionmaking. To assess whether a project is "required by present or future public convenience and necessity,"¹⁹ FERC must "evaluate *all factors* bearing on the public interest."²⁰ Relevant factors include any "adverse effects" to "general societal interests," and specifically include "environmental impacts" beyond just those

¹⁴ *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).

¹⁵ 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).

¹⁶ *Ctr. for Biological Diversity*, 538 F.3d at 1194 (citations omitted).

¹⁷ *Id.* at 1217.

¹⁸ *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 and to explain why those costs could not be quantified").

¹⁹ 15 U.S.C. § 717f(e).

²⁰ *Missouri Public Serv. Comm'n v. FERC*, 234 F. 3d 36, 38 (D.C. Cir. 2000) (quoting *Atlantic Ref. Co. v. Public Serv. Comm'n*, 360 U.S. 378, 391 (1959)) (emphasis added).

experienced by landowners and the surrounding community, extending to cover the range of “other environmental issues considered under the National Environmental Policy Act.”²¹ When FERC “articulate[s] the critical facts upon which it relies” to review public convenience and necessity, “[a] passing reference to relevant factors . . . is not sufficient to satisfy the Commission’s obligation to carry out ‘reasoned’ and ‘principled’ decisionmaking. [Courts] have repeatedly required the Commission to ‘fully articulate the basis for its decision.’”²² Consequently, when FERC weighs a project’s climate consequences directly into its review of public convenience and necessity, monetization using the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics achieves the goal of fully articulating a relevant factor, while quantification alone would obscure important details.

Under Section 3 of the NGA, regulatory oversight for the export of LNG and supporting facilities is divided between FERC and the Department of Energy (DOE). The NGA prohibits exportation of any natural gas from the U.S. to a foreign country without authorization.²³ The DOE delegated its authority to approve or deny applications for the siting, construction, expansion, or operation of LNG terminals to FERC, while retaining exclusive authority over the export of natural gas.²⁴

Section 7 of the NGA provides FERC with the requisite authority to authorize the construction and operation of interstate natural gas pipelines, storage projects, and LNG facilities, which it approves through the issuance of a certificate of public convenience and necessity (hereinafter, “certificate”).²⁵ There is a presumption favoring LNG authorization under Section 3 of the NGA, which provides that “an LNG proposal ‘shall’ be authorized unless the proposal ‘will not be consistent with the public interest.’”²⁶ Conversely, FERC’s review of new interstate natural gas pipelines under Section 7 of the NGA is not presumptive and requires a finding that a pipeline proposal “is or will be required by the present or future public convenience and necessity.”²⁷ Section 7(c) of the NGA has been characterized as “the heart of the statute.”²⁸ This is because this statutory section provides FERC with wide latitude to establish natural gas policy.²⁹

FERC fails to provide estimates of any of the project’s downstream emissions. While some court cases indicate that the Department of Energy, and not FERC, is responsible for evaluating emissions from gas exported from LNG terminals,³⁰ the downstream emissions of pipelines must be analyzed and disclosed to the public under NEPA, and courts have recently instructed FERC to analyze downstream emissions from pipeline projects. In a recent case about another pipeline project,³¹ the D.C. Circuit concluded that because greenhouse gas emissions are an indirect, reasonably foreseeable effect of authorizing the

²¹ 88 FERC ¶ 61,227, Statement of Policy at pp.23-24 (Sept. 15, 1999). *See, e.g., Minisink Residents for Env’tl. Pres. v. FERC*, 762 F.3d 97, 101 (D.C. Cir. 2014) (“listing “conservation” and “environmental . . . issues” as the NGA’s “subsidiary purposes”).

²² *Missouri Public Serv. Comm’n*, 234 F.3d at 40, 41 (citations omitted).

²³ 15 U.S.C. § 717b(a).

²⁴ *EarthReports, Inc., d/b/a/ Patuxent Riverkeeper, et al. v. FERC*, 2016 WL 3853830 at *2 (D.C. Cir. July 15, 2016) (citing Dep’t of Energy Delegation Order No. 00-004.00A (effective May 16, 2006); 42 U.S.C. § 7172(e)).

²⁵ 15 U.S.C. § 717(f) (2014).

²⁶ 15 U.S.C. § 717b(a).

²⁷ 15 U.S.C. § 717f(e); *EarthReports, Inc.*, 2016 WL 3853830 at *2 (citing *W. Va. Pub. Servs. Comm’n v. Dep’t of Energy*, 681 F.2d 847, 856 (D.C. Cir. 1982)).

²⁸ James H. McGrew, AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION BASIC PRACTICE SERIES: FED. ENERGY REGULATORY COMM’N 76 (2d ed. 2009).

²⁹ Joseph P. Tomain, ENERGY LAW IN A NUTSHELL 288 (2d ed. 2011).

³⁰ *Sierra Club v. FERC*, 827 F.3d 36, 48 (D.C. Cir. 2016).

³¹ *Sierra Club v. FERC*, 867 F.3d 1357 (D.C. Cir. 2017) (“*Sabal Trail*”).

project that FERC has legal authority to mitigate the impacts of the Southeast Market Pipelines Project and should have provided a quantitative estimate of the downstream greenhouse emissions that would result from burning the natural gas transported by the pipelines, or at least explained more specifically why the agency could not do so.³² The D.C. Circuit reached its conclusion as a growing number of other federal courts have held that NEPA requires analysis of reasonably foreseeable upstream and downstream emissions.³³ The DEIS does not specify that all natural gas transported by the pipeline will ultimately be exported through the LNG terminal.³⁴ And though in *Sabal Trail* the D.C. Circuit knew which power plants would burn the gas from the pipeline, knowing the exact, individual end-uses is not a necessary precondition to assessing reasonably foreseeable downstream emissions.³⁵ Accordingly, FERC should provide an estimate of the project’s lifecycle emissions, including downstream emissions.

Additionally, FERC failed to meaningfully analyze and disclose the fugitive emissions of GHGs associated with the project. In the DEIS, FERC merely states that the project would “result in fugitive emissions of GHGs (primarily [methane])” but that these fugitive emissions “do not require additional analysis.”³⁶ Fugitive emissions for the project include 2,781 tons per year of CO₂e associated with the proposed gas treatment plant,³⁷ and 2,424 tons per year of CO₂e associated with the liquefaction facilities operation.³⁸ However, FERC failed to analyze the methane leakage potential for a project of this large scale, and failed to disclose the impacts of these fugitive emissions in a way the public and decisionmakers can understand.

FERC Must Assess Actual 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, nor are they the relevant “factors bearing on the public interest” under the NGA. Rather, the actual effects and relevant factors are the incremental climate impacts caused by those emissions, and must be analyzed and disclosed to the public, including:³⁹

³² *Id.* at 1375.

³³ See, e.g., *WildEarth Guardians*, 870 F.3d at 1237-38; *Mid States*, 345 F.3d at 549-50; *Montana Env’tl. Info. Ctr.*, 274 F. Supp. 3d at 1090-91; *San Juan Citizens Alliance*, 326 F.Supp.3d at 1243-44; *W. Org. of Res. Councils*, No. CV-16-21-GF-BMM, at *13; *WildEarth Guardians v. Zinke*, 2019 WL at *14-18.

³⁴ For example, DEIS at 2-18 indicates that the mainline pipeline will include three gas interconnections “to allow for future in-state deliveries of natural gas.”

³⁵ See Jayni Hein et al., *Pipeline Approvals and Greenhouse Gas Emissions* (Institute for Policy Integrity Report, 2019), https://policvintegrity.org/files/publications/Pipeline_Approvals_and_GHG_Emissions.pdf. at 16.

³⁶ DEIS at 4-915.

³⁷ *Id.* at 4-903

³⁸ *Id.* at 4-925.

³⁹ 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*

- 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, CO₂ 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 percentage comparison to sectoral, regional, or national emissions, an agency fails to meaningfully assess the actual incremental impacts to property, human health, productivity, and so forth.⁴⁰ An agency therefore falls short of its legal obligations and statutory objectives by disclosing only volume estimates. Similarly, courts have held that merely 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.”⁴¹

By monetizing climate damages using the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics, FERC can satisfy NEPA’s mandate to analyze and disclose to the public the actual effects of emissions and their significance. 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

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).

⁴⁰ 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. Env’tl. 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”).

⁴¹ *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). See also *NRDC v. U.S. Nuclear Reg. Comm’n*, 685 F.2d 459, 487 (D.C. Cir. 1982) (ruling 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”), *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).

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.⁴²

FERC incorrectly claims that it cannot “attribute discrete, quantifiable, physical effects on the environment to the Project’s incremental contribution to GHGs.”⁴³ Monetizing the project’s greenhouse gas emissions would allow FERC to determine exactly the project’s discrete impacts on climate change.

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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

As a result, focusing just on the volume or rate of emissions 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. For example, 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 2012.⁴⁶ 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 2014.⁴⁷ 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\$).⁴⁸ 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 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 using the social cost of greenhouse gases would accurately reveal that the emissions in 2014 were much

⁴² 2010 TSD, *supra* note 39, at 5.

⁴³ DEIS at 4-1162

⁴⁴ Carbon dioxide also has cumulative effects on ocean acidification, in addition to cumulative radiative-forcing effects.

⁴⁵ See 2010 TSD, *supra* note 39, at 33 (explaining that the social cost of greenhouse gas estimates grow over time).

⁴⁶ 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).

⁴⁷ 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.*

⁴⁸ 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].

more damaging than the emissions in 2012—almost \$50 million more. This example illustrates why only providing a percentage comparison against national or global greenhouse gas inventories (as FERC has done in other environmental reviews) is misleading.

Capturing how marginal climate damages change as the background concentration changes is especially important because NEPA requires assessing both present and future impacts.⁴⁹ 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. For example, FERC acknowledges that the applicant has not yet provided a revised construction schedule, but says such timing changes would not affect its determination of the project's impacts' significance.⁵⁰ Nor does FERC seriously consider an option to delay the pipeline project. Such an alternative could significantly change the climate consequences of natural gas projects, especially because a project's relative greenhouse gas effect compared to other alternatives or to the no-action *status quo* can change over time as the fuel mix in the overall market changes.⁵¹ If FERC had used the social cost of greenhouse gases to assess the significance of the project's climate effects, it would know that a different timeline for construction and operation of the project can result in different total climate consequences. For the reasons explained above, calculating volumes or percentages is insufficient to accurately compare the climate damages of project 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 projects with varying greenhouse gas emissions over time.

Furthermore, FERC should use the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics to determine if the “updated construction emission calculations” it requests from AGDC⁵² will result in a significant difference in the timing of emissions as presented in this DEIS. If the change in the timing of construction emissions, or total construction emissions, results in a significant change in monetized climate damages, that change should be disclosed for the public, with an additional opportunity to comment on any significant changes before the EIS is finalized.

Monetization Provides the Required Informational Context that Volume Estimates Lack

NEPA requires sufficient informational context; the NGA requires a reasoned explanation of factors and more than “passing references.”⁵³ Yet without proper context, numbers like 125 thousand tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent in annual emissions from compressor station operations⁵⁴ will be misinterpreted by people as meaningless. 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. For example, presenting all weather-related deaths as less than 0.1% of total

⁴⁹ 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).

⁵⁰ DEIS at 4-898.

⁵¹ See U.S. Energy Info. Admin., *Annual Energy Outlook 2018 with Projections to 2050* at 84 (2018) (projecting coal’s share of electricity generation to decline over time, while renewables’ share increases).

⁵² DEIS at 4-898.

⁵³ See *Missouri Public Serv. Comm’n*, 234 F.3d at 41.

⁵⁴ DEIS at 4-913

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 year⁵⁵—hardly an insignificant figure.⁵⁶ 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.”⁵⁷ 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.

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 take FERC’s word that because there are no greenhouse gas emissions targets, it is impossible “to determine the significance of the Project’s contribution to climate change”⁵⁸ and therefore the project’s emissions should be treated as zero. 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.⁵⁹ People have significant “difficulty understanding a host of numerical concepts, especially risks and probabilities.”⁶⁰ FERC’s characterization of the project’s greenhouse gas emissions misleadingly makes the climate impacts appear vanishingly small. By comparison, by applying the social cost of carbon dioxide (about \$52 per ton for year 2020 emissions in 2018⁶¹), decisionmakers and the public can readily comprehend that up to 15 million tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions from the project’s operational activities in just in the year 2020 would generate over \$780 million in climate damages.⁶²

Similarly, many people will be unable to distinguish the significance of project alternatives or scenario analyses with different emissions: for example, whether there is a significant difference between 6.6 million metric tons of emissions from gas treatment plant operations with “maximum flare” versus 4.2 million metric tons without maximum flare.⁶³ As the U.S. 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.”⁶⁴ Abstract volume estimates fail to give people the required informational context due to another well-documented

⁵⁵ 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).

⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁷ *Southwestern Elec. Power Co. v. EPA*, No. 15-60821, 2019 WL 1577740 at *22 (5th Cir., Apr. 12, 2019).

⁵⁸ DEIS at 4-1162.

⁵⁹ Cass R. Sunstein, *Probability Neglect: Emotions, Worst Cases, and Law*, 112 Yale L. J. 61, 63, 72 (2002).

⁶⁰ Valerie Reyna & Charles Brainerd, *Numeracy, Ratio Bias, and Denominator Neglect in Judgments of Risk and Probability*, 18 *Learning & Individual Differences* 89 (2007).

⁶¹ See *supra* note 5.

⁶² See calculation *supra* note 5.

⁶³ DEIS at 4-903.

⁶⁴ 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 (CO₂) 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.”).

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.⁶⁵

Scope neglect means many decisionmakers and members of the public would be unable to meaningfully distinguish the climate risks of 6.6 million versus 4.2 million metric tons of emissions. Certainly people can discern that one number is higher, but without any context it may be difficult to weigh the relative magnitude of the climate risks from these volumes of emissions. In contrast, the climate risks would have been readily discernible through application of the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics. In this example, the additional 2.4 million metric tons from maximum flare events contributes over \$124 million in additional climate damages.⁶⁶

In general, non-monetized effects are often irrationally treated as worthless.⁶⁷ On several occasions, courts have struck down administrative decisions for failing to give weight to non-monetized effects.⁶⁸ 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.”⁶⁹ Monetizing climate damages provides the informational context required by NEPA and the NGA, whereas a simple tally of emissions volume and 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.⁷⁰

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

Though NEPA does not require a full and formal cost-benefit analysis in all cases,⁷¹ 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

⁶⁵ 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).

⁶⁶ See figures and calculation at *supra* note 5.

⁶⁷ Richard Revesz, *Quantifying Regulatory Benefits*, 102 Cal. L. Rev. 1424, 1434-35, 1442 (2014).

⁶⁸ See *id.* at 1428, 1434.

⁶⁹ 538 F.3d at 1199.

⁷⁰ 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”).

⁷¹ 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.”); *High Country*, 52 F.Supp.3d at 1191 (holding that NEPA does not require cost-benefit analysis, although monetizing benefits but not costs is arbitrary and capricious).

selectively monetize benefits in support of its decision while refusing to monetize the costs of its action.⁷²

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.”⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

High Country and *MEIC v. OSM* are 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.⁷⁶ For example, in *Center for Biological Diversity v. NHTSA*, 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.”⁷⁷ Specifically, it was arbitrary to “assign[] no value to *the most significant benefit* of more stringent [vehicle fuel efficiency] standards: reduction in carbon emissions.”⁷⁸ 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.”⁷⁹ 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”⁸⁰; 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.⁸¹

⁷² *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).

⁷³ 52 F. Supp. 3d at 1191.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

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

⁷⁶ 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).

⁷⁷ 538 F.3d 1172, 1203 (9th Cir. 2008).

⁷⁸ *Id.* at 1199.

⁷⁹ *Id.* at 1198.

⁸⁰ *Bus. Roundtable v. SCC*, 647 F.3d 1144, 1148-49 (D.C. Cir. 2011)

⁸¹ *Johnston v. Davis*, 698 F.2d 1088, 1094–95 (10th Cir. 1983)

Here, the DEIS reports \$395 million in labor income for a single year of operations,⁸² as well as construction payroll⁸³ and total purchases⁸⁴—categories of economic benefits similar to the income and output benefits highlighted in *High Country* and *MEIC*.⁸⁵ The DEIS repeatedly refers to the project’s “economic benefits,”⁸⁶ and relies on monetized figures of payroll and purchases to conclude that “[i]ndirect economic benefits via tax revenue, employment, and spending would be expected to be permanent and significant.”⁸⁷ FERC violates NEPA by reporting impacts like earnings in monetized figures while failing to use another readily available protocol to monetize important environmental costs.

II. The Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas Metric Is the Appropriate Tool to Assess the Significance of a Project’s Emissions

The draft EIS claims that the agency is “not aware of a tool to meaningfully attribute specific increases in global CO₂ concentrations, heat forcing, or similar global impacts to Project-specific GHG emissions,”⁸⁸ and that “[w]ithout either the ability to determine discrete resource impacts or an established target to compare GHG emissions against,” FERC is “unable to determine the significance of the Project’s contribution to climate change.”⁸⁹ However, FERC’s claim is misleading: applying the social cost of greenhouse gas protocol to monetize the incremental climate impacts of specific projects is appropriate, straightforward, and meaningfully facilitates review of the significance of a project’s environmental impacts. Indeed, FERC has elsewhere admitted that “we accept that the Social Cost of Carbon methodology does constitute a tool that can be used to estimate incremental physical climate change impacts.”⁹⁰

Monetization Is Appropriate and Useful in Any Decision with Significant Climate Impacts, and Its Use Should Not Be Limited to Regulatory Analyses

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 a particular unit of emissions—whether 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 fossil fuel extraction process, whether emitted because of a regulation or a resource management decision, whether emitted in Colorado or Maine or anywhere else, the marginal climate damages per unit of emissions remain the same. Indeed, the social

⁸² DEIS at 4-605.

⁸³ DEIS at table 4.11.2-6.

⁸⁴ DEIS at 4-602.

⁸⁵ The DEIS also suggests significant governmental revenue benefits, see DEIS at table 4.11.4-3.

⁸⁶ DEIS at ES-4, 4-602, 4-1147, 5-33.

⁸⁷ DEIS at 4-1147.

⁸⁸ DEIS at 4-1162.

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Sabal Trail Remand Order*, 162 FERC 61,233, at P 48.

cost of greenhouse gases has been used by many federal and state agencies in environmental impact analyses⁹¹ and in resource management decisions.⁹²

The Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas Metric 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” 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.

Some of the 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.⁹³ A key advantage of using the social cost of greenhouse gas tool is that each physical

⁹¹ 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).

⁹² 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.

⁹³ 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);

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,⁹⁴ 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.

By applying the social cost of greenhouse gases, the common metric of money provides the very framework for assessing significance that FERC is looking for. While the relative significance of, for example, 20,000 additional tons of carbon dioxide per year versus 2 million additional tons of carbon dioxide per year may be somewhat challenging to discern, the relative significance of \$1 million per year in climate damages versus \$100 million per year in climate damages is much easier to discern. In this case, applying the social cost of greenhouse gases reveals that the project's direct operational emissions alone will cause at least \$780 million per year in property damage, lost productivity, premature death, and other quantifiable effects.⁹⁵ Determining the significance of \$780 million in annual climate damages still requires FERC to exercise its professional judgment, but that is no different than how FERC routinely applies its judgment to determine the significance of impacts to landowners, the local community, or the tax base. Tellingly, in this DEIS, FERC first monetizes the project's employment payroll figures and total purchasing before concluding that "[i]ndirect economic benefits via tax revenue, employment, and spending would be expected to be permanent *and significant*."⁹⁶ In short, FERC used monetized figures of alleged economic benefits to assess significance. Similarly, as opposed to the raw volume estimates, monetized figures of climate damage could be reasonably weighed by FERC against reasonable judgments about a project's other qualitative, quantitative, or monetized costs and benefits. In short, applying the social cost of greenhouse gases is both straightforward and meaningfully informs FERC's decisions under NEPA and the NGA in ways that volume estimates alone cannot.

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

While there may not be a bright-line test for determining significance, the potential emissions from this project are clearly significant and warrant monetization. In *High Country*, the District Court for the District of Colorado 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."⁹⁷ That suggests a threshold for monetization far below the tons of greenhouse gases at stake here. In *MEIC v. OSM*, the District Court for the District of Montana found it was arbitrary for the Office of Surface Mining not to monetize the 23.16 million metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent.⁹⁸ In *Center for Biological Diversity*, the Ninth Circuit found that it was arbitrary for the Department of Transportation

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).

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

⁹⁵ The central estimate for the social cost of carbon for year 2020 emissions is \$42 in 2007\$. Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, *Technical Update of the Social Cost of Carbon 4* (2016). Using the CPI inflation calculator, \$42 in 2007\$ was worth about \$52 in 2018\$. 1.97 million tons CO₂e + .393 million tons CO₂e * \$52/ton = ~\$104 million in climate damages for year 2020 emissions. A full analysis of climate damages would account for the facts that the social cost of carbon rises over time, but also that future costs and benefits should be discounted to present value.

⁹⁶ DEIS at 4-1147 (emphasis added).

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

⁹⁸ *MEIC v. Office of Surface Mining* at 36-37.

not to monetize the 35 million metric ton difference in lifetime emissions from increasing the fuel efficiency of motor vehicles:⁹⁹ 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 two million metric tons per year. In a recent environmental impact statement from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management published in August 2017, the agency explained that the social cost of carbon was “a useful measure” to apply to 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,¹⁰⁰ or about 5 million metric tons per year.

Under any reasonable application of the social cost of greenhouse gas metrics, the high-end emissions estimates from the operations of the project will cause more than \$780 million of dollars in climate damages each year. Tellingly, FERC deemed it appropriate to monetize smaller effects of the project. For example, it had no problem reporting the potential for the project to generate \$395 million in per year in operational labor income.¹⁰¹ A potential climate cost of hundreds of millions of dollars is also significant, particularly in the context of a document the very purpose of which is to evaluate a project’s *environmental* impacts.

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

Even without a full cost-benefit analysis of the project, monetizing one key impact still provides useful information for decisionmakers and the public even when monetizing other impacts is not feasible. The social cost of greenhouse gases enables a more accurate and transparent comparison of alternatives along the dimension of climate impacts even if other costs and benefits cannot be quantified, and “breakeven analysis” could provide a framework for making decisions when some effects but not others are monetized. Climate damages can and should be monetized even if other costs and benefits are harder to quantify or monetize and so must be discussed qualitatively. Many effects can readily be quantified and monetized, and agencies should generally do so when feasible; other effects, like water quality, are notoriously difficult to quantify and monetize, due to the geographically idiosyncratic nature of individual water bodies. Greenhouse gases, by comparison, have the same impact on climate change no matter where they are emitted, and those impacts are readily monetized using the social cost of greenhouse gases methodology. Regardless of whether all other effects can be monetized, using the social cost of greenhouse gases provides useful and necessary information to the public and decisionmakers. 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 the best means of comparing project alternatives along the dimension of climate change.

Moreover, analytical frameworks exist to weigh qualitative effects alongside monetized effects. NEPA regulations, for example, first state that if there are “important qualitative considerations,” then the ultimate “weighing of the merits and drawbacks of the various alternatives” should not be displayed exclusively as a “monetary cost-benefit analysis.” Nevertheless, NEPA regulations further acknowledge

⁹⁹ 538 F.3d at 1187.

¹⁰⁰ 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).

¹⁰¹ DEIS at 4-605.

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.”¹⁰² In other words, agencies should provide quantified and/or monetized impacts to the extent practicable, alongside any qualitative assessment.

The Office of Management and Budget’s *Circular A-4*¹⁰³ guidance to agencies on conducting economic analysis also provides a framework for weighing monetized and qualitative costs and benefits, called break-even analysis:

It will not always be possible to express in monetary units all of the important benefits and costs. When it is not, the most efficient alternative will not necessarily be the one with the largest quantified and monetized net-benefit estimate. In such cases, you should exercise professional judgment in determining how important the non-quantified benefits or costs may be in the context of the overall analysis. If the non-quantified benefits and costs are likely to be important, you should carry out a “threshold” analysis to evaluate their significance. Threshold or “break-even” analysis answers the question, “How 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?” In addition to threshold analysis you should indicate, where possible, which non-quantified effects are most important and why.¹⁰⁴

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.

III. FERC Should Use the Interagency Working Group’s 2016 Estimates of the Social Cost of Carbon, Methane, and Nitrous Oxide

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).¹⁰⁵ Agencies must continue to use estimates of a similar or higher¹⁰⁶ 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.

FERC’s insistence on continuing to wait for a “universally accepted” tool that can “meaningfully attribute specific increases in global CO₂ concentrations, heat forcing, or similar global impacts to Project-specific GHG emissions,”¹⁰⁷ sets the wrong standard for analysis. Though perhaps not “universally accepted”—as

¹⁰² 40 C.F.R. § 1502.23.

¹⁰³ Though *Circular A-4* focus 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.

¹⁰⁴ OMB, *Circular A-4* at 2 (2003).

¹⁰⁵ 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>.

¹⁰⁶ 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).

¹⁰⁷ DEIS at 4-1162.

evident by FERC’s continued opposition to the metrics—the IWG’s social cost of greenhouse gas estimates have been used in over 100 federal actions and numerous state actions.¹⁰⁸ The social cost of greenhouse gas tool has been widely used precisely because it allows agencies to consider the actual effects of emissions and their significance in ways that merely providing a quantitative estimate of the volume of emissions cannot.

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.”¹⁰⁹ IWG’s methods combined three frequently used models built to predict the economic costs of the physical impacts of each additional ton of carbon.¹¹⁰ 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.¹¹¹ 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.¹¹² 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.¹¹³

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.¹¹⁴ 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.¹¹⁵

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.¹¹⁶ In 2016 and 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine issued two reports that, while recommending future

¹⁰⁸ Institute for Policy Integrity, *Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases*, Issue Brief (Feb 2017).

¹⁰⁹ 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>.

¹¹⁰ *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).

¹¹¹ *Id.* at 6-8.

¹¹² *Id.* at 24-25.

¹¹³ 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.

¹¹⁴ See 2016 IWG Addendum at 2.

¹¹⁵ *Id.* at 3.

¹¹⁶ 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>.

improvements to the methodology, supported the continued use of the existing IWG estimates.¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸ It is, therefore, unsurprising that leading economists and climate policy experts have endorsed the IWG’s values as the best available estimates.¹¹⁹

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.¹²⁰ 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.”¹²¹ 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.¹²² 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,¹²³ does not—and legally cannot—remove agencies’ statutory requirement to fully analyze and 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.”¹²⁴ In other words, when the guidance originally recommended the appropriate use of the social cost of greenhouse gases in environmental impact statements,¹²⁵ it was simply explaining that use

¹¹⁷ 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>.

¹¹⁸ *Zero Zone*, 832 F.3d at 679.

¹¹⁹ 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).

¹²⁰ Exec. Order No. 13,783 § 5(b), 82 *Fed. Reg.* 16,093 (Mar. 28, 2017).

¹²¹ *Id.* § 5(c).

¹²² 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).

¹²³ Exec. Order 13,783 § 3(c).

¹²⁴ 82 *Fed. Reg.* 16,576, 16,576 (Apr. 5, 2017).

¹²⁵ 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

of 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.¹²⁶ 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.”¹²⁷

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. FERC 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 FERC 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

Generally, uncertainty is *not* a reason to abandon the social cost of greenhouse gas methodologies;¹²⁸ 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

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.”).

¹²⁶ *Draft Environmental Impact Statement—Liberty Development Project in the Beaufort Sea, Alaska* at 3-129.

¹²⁷ 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).

¹²⁸ *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.”).

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.¹²⁹ 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.¹³⁰ 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-4.¹³¹

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.¹³²

¹²⁹ Howard and Sylvan 2015, *supra* note **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, at 2. (“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 Pindyck 2016.

¹³⁰ 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.”).

¹³¹ CIRCULAR A-4 at 39.

¹³² 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 129, at 3 (citing 2009 survey).

- 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.¹³³
- 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.¹³⁴

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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¹³³ 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 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.”).

¹³⁴ See Revesz et al., *Global Warming: Improve Economic Models of Climate Change*, *supra* note 133; 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).

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

Attached:

Joint Comments to FERC on Using the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases to Weigh Climate Impacts of New Natural Gas Transportation Facilities in Environmental Analyses and in Reviews of Public Convenience and Necessity (Docket No. PL18-1-000) (submitted July 25, 2018)

Jayni Hein et al., Pipeline Approvals and Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Institute for Policy Integrity Report (2019)