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Home > House committee questions Bureau of Land Management on implementation of Helium Stewardship Act

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On July 15, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held an oversight hearing to examine the implementation of the Helium Stewardship Act of 2013 (HSA). The hearing focused on efforts undertaken by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to ensure that taxpayers receive fair value for federal helium resources.

Under the HSA, helium refiners are required to report excess refining capacity to the BLM, as well as refine, or toll, crude helium for other non-refiners. This tolling would have to occur at what the legislation calls “commercially reasonable rates.” Chairman Doug Lamborn (R-CO) said that this legislation represents a change in the long-standing policy, whereby BLM would collaborate with an exclusive group of refiners and sell the federal resource at below-market prices, as well as actively deny non-refiners access to helium pipelines.

Rep. Bill Flores (R-TX) said that he wants to see more work from the agency to guarantee access to the pipelines for non-refiners, while Rep. Matt Cartwright (D-PA) expressed concern regarding the ability of BLM to ensure that refiners accurately report excess refining capacity. Linda Lance, Deputy Director of Programs and Policy at the BLM, replied that the BLM has issued forms defining excess refining capacity and affirmed the agency’s commitment to providing access to the pipelines and effectively implementing the HSA.

Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (R-WA) and Rep. Lamborn plan to introduce a discussion draft of legislation, the American Helium Security Act of 2014, that will secure and encourage future production of domestic helium and create a federal leasing program for helium on federal lands.

Sources: House Natural Resources Committee

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