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## BLM must show it will honor commitments in Wyoming

Star-Tribune Editorial Board

By its own admission, the Bureau of Land Management hasn't done the job it promised to do in western Wyoming.

For the past six years, the agency has failed to live up to the public's trust that it would monitor and limit harm to wildlife and air quality from natural gas drilling.

It doesn't matter whether the agency was overworked, understaffed, or responding to the demands of the Bush administration to let drilling be approved at a faster rate. What is most important now is for the BLM to release a public plan showing precisely how it will fulfill its obligations in the future.

There are some positive signs that things may change for the better at the BLM office in Pinedale. Last spring, the incoming field office manager, Dennis Stenger, asked the staff to prepare a report showing what kind of job the agency was doing to meet its environmental commitments. That's exactly the right approach.

The result was an internal document that was later leaked to the press. While it was never intended to be made public, it does show that the staff is concerned about not having time to honor commitments the agency made to track pollution from drilling in the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline natural gas fields.

This isn't a case of merely having a few things the agency promised to do fall through the cracks. The BLM document includes 15 pages of requirements that have not been met, including numerous commitments to track nitrous oxide emissions -- 26 on the Pinedale Anticline and 29 for the Jonah Field.

Emissions of nitrous oxides, from gas field engine exhaust and the burning of waste gas, are a primary cause of the ground-level ozone that has reduced air quality in western Wyoming. It is estimated the emissions of nitrous oxides have been three times the level the agency predicted. The agency simply said it "had a lapse" in monitoring and is now correcting the problem.

A BLM spokesman noted 90 percent of the agency's commitments have been met or are on schedule for completion. What's troubling is another comment he made that questions "whether all the commitments in various documents are even doable."

They not only must be doable, they must be done. The public's confidence in the agency is already shaky, and this is no time for the BLM to return to agreements and try to get out of its commitments.

For the past two years the BLM has been approving drilling permits at an extraordinary rate, faster than companies can even drill. That fact alone indicates there is time to slow

down the process and complete the monitoring and mitigation the agency promised the public it would do.

The leaked document gives the agency a perfect opportunity to demonstrate it is not willing to compromise Wyoming's environmental standards for the sake of energy development. State officials and the public must insist on it.