



## 2017: A Very Bad Year for Presidential Environmental Stewardship

### *The Year in Review of Trump Administration Environmental Policy*

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The following report provides a brief synopsis of the Trump administration's policy decisions on environmental issues, spanning public lands, wildlife conservation, climate policy, and public health and safety. This analysis is organized along a timeline so that the unfolding of policy decision points can be clearly illustrated, is sourced with hyperlinks for easy validation, and is annotated by the following types of actions:

**Personnel Change** – These include nominations of political appointees into leadership posts in federal agencies, as well as personnel moves for career professional workers that illustrate significant trends in environmental policy or have significant consequences in terms of agency performance.

**Policy Change** – Policy changes involve orders or instructions given to federal agencies in the absence of formal changes to laws or regulations.

**Initiating Regulation Change** – These actions begin a formal change away from current environmental regulations or the initiation of decisions that will significantly impact the environment on the ground. As such, they do not represent final agency actions.

**Report** – These are Trump administration analyses in draft or final form that express the administration's proposed direction on an environmental issue and/or shed light on the administration's weighting of the facts informing agency decision-making.

**Final Regulation Change** – Regulations are adopted as a means to interpret how agencies must make their decisions in order to comply with applicable federal laws. They are legally binding, and final regulations represent final agency actions that will bind the decisions of this and potentially future administrations.

**Law Change** – These are new laws or amendments to existing laws that fundamentally change the legal requirements to protect (or not protect) the environment. Both chambers of Congress must pass each law change, which becomes legally binding when it is signed by the President.

In the wake of the presidential election, [conservationists expressed concern](#) that the incoming Trump administration would undertake major attacks on the environment and on the safety net of laws and regulations designed to protect it. The first year of Trump environmental decisions has largely confirmed this prognosis. There are a few recurring central themes that have become the hallmarks of the Trump administration's environmental policy during the administration's first year in office:

- Targeting regulations adopted under President Obama for reversal with an almost personal zeal, particularly using the Congressional Review Act, which permits Congress to overturn regulations adopted by the Executive Branch within the last 60 days.
- Suppression of science and free expression of agency scientists, particularly regarding climate change
- Eliminating environmental protections, particularly those opposed by the fossil fuels industry

Taken together, the Trump administration's environmental record in 2017 reflects a sweeping failure in environmental stewardship that spans a broad range of environmental issues. Pundits started comparing Donald Trump to conservation icon Theodore Roosevelt [as far back as 2015](#), with [Vice President Mike Pence](#), former [House Speaker John Boehner](#), and [Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke](#) doing what they could to cast a Teddy Roosevelt aura around the Trump presidency. But [conservationists were skeptical](#) from the beginning, and as 2017 brought repeated attacks on conservation interests, [sportsmens' groups](#) grew increasingly disenchanted as well, with [attacks on Roosevelt's National Monument legacy](#) providing a particularly telling contrast in conservation ethic between the two Presidents. While many point to these environmental attacks as [unprecedented](#), and some of them clearly are, [others](#) draw parallels to the George W. Bush administration, which also undertook major attacks on the environment.

### **Timeline and Analysis of Trump Administration Environmental Decisions**

**January 17 – Personnel Change:** Trump Interior Secretary nominee [Ryan Zinke has confirmation hearing](#), declares “Upfront, I am an unapologetic admirer of Teddy Roosevelt.” Initially, conservation groups judged Zinke as a [less-objectionable alternative](#) to the [more virulently anti-environmental political figures](#) who crowded the short list as potential Interior nominees. Sportsmens' groups initially [endorsed the Zinke nomination](#), but [later expressed disappointment](#) in his anti-conservation policies as Zinke's anti-conservation performance failed to live up to the Teddy Roosevelt rhetoric.

**January 19 – Personnel Change:** President-elect Trump [nominates Sonny Perdue](#), former Governor of Georgia, as Secretary of Agriculture. The Department of Agriculture oversees the U.S. Forest Service, the agency Wildlife Services which is in charge of killing wildlife for the benefit of farmers and ranchers, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which largely oversees loosely conservation-related subsidies for farmers and ranchers. Perdue was trained as a veterinarian and is a [former fertilizer salesman](#), but drew criticism for having a [poor environmental record](#) as a climate denier and a supporter of factory farms.

**January 20 –** Donald J. Trump is inaugurated as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. President Trump made [no mention of the environment or climate](#) change in his inaugural address.

**January 20 – Personnel Change:** Trump [nominates Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt](#), who had [sued the Environmental Protection Agency 14 times](#) to block clean water and air rules,

to head the EPA. Pruitt was subsequently the subject of a [Frontline documentary](#) titled ‘War on the EPA’ documenting his political rise to command the agency he had worked throughout his career to destroy.

**January 20 – Policy Change:** All [references to climate change are deleted](#) from the White House website.

**January 24 – Initiating Regulation Change:** Trump signs Presidential Memorandum approving the [Keystone XL Pipeline](#). This pipeline is intended to convey crude oil from tar sands deposits in Canada to export terminals on the U.S. Gulf Coast. The strip mining of Canadian boreal forests is widely decried by conservationists as an [environmental disaster](#) of the first magnitude, and Keystone XL is expected to extend and increase the strip mining. The pipeline was initially [denied a permit](#) in November 2017 by President Obama.

**January 24 – Initiating Regulation Change:** Trump signs Presidential Memorandum [approving the Dakota Access Pipeline](#), despite controversy over the likelihood of oil spills contaminating important drinking water sources and violations of Native American treaty rights. A [major oil spill](#) from an unrelated North Dakota pipeline, as well as [subsequent spills from the Dakota Access Pipeline](#) itself, validate tribal concerns that the Dakota Access Pipeline poses a significant oil spill threat to drinking water supplies in the region.

**January 24 – Policy Change:** President Trump orders the EPA to [delete internet content referencing climate change](#). [Parts of the webpage are removed](#) and some later reappear, but with [references to climate change removed](#). Over time, the administration undertakes a [gradual purge](#) of web content regarding human causes of climate change. [City governments respond](#) by posting some of the deleted EPA documents.

**January 24 – Policy Change:** President Trump mandates that [all studies by EPA scientists will be subject to review](#) by political appointees before release, and in the interim will be placed on hold. The EPA and other agencies are also placed under a [gag order](#) that precludes officials from talking to reporters or posting web content online. This is accompanied by a gag order precluding the use of official agency Twitter accounts after [Badlands National Park employees began tweeting scientific facts](#) on their official account. Federal employees respond by [creating Alt-NPS](#) and [other unofficial social media accounts](#) so that they can continue to disseminate their perspectives via social media outside official agency channels.

**January 30 – Policy Change:** President Trump signs Executive Order [requiring two regulations to be removed for every regulation added](#). While this [action](#) is touted by the administration as a means of reducing regulations burdensome to industry and costly to enforce, environmentalists interpret the move as an effort to undermine longstanding protections for the environment and public health and safety.

**February 7 – Final Regulation Change:** Army Corps of Engineers reverses its stance and [approves an easement](#) to allow completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Before the pipeline even [begins commercial service](#) on June 1, [it starts spilling oil](#).

**February 9 – Policy Change:** About half of the 34 [EPA staff are pulled from Alaska Forum on the Environment](#), a [statewide gathering](#) of agency professionals, conservationists, businesses, and community leaders. The EPA was [directed by the Trump transition](#) team to “minimize their participation” in the conference.

**February 14 – Law Change:** Trump signs bill [repealing anti-corruption regulations](#) that required fossil fuel companies to disclose payments to foreign governments. Critics of the move point to a [corrosive effect of oil-fueled bribery](#) in poorer nations.

**February 16 – Law Change:** President signs [legislation repealing Office of Surface Mining’s Stream Protection Rule](#), which protected waterways from coal mining waste.

**February 28 – Initiating Regulation Change:** Executive Order initiates a [review of the Waters of the United States](#) regulation (also known as the Clean Water Rule), which determines which waters will be protected under the Clean Water Act, and which waters are ineligible for legal protection.

**March 2 – Policy Change:** Interior Secretary Zinke signs a [Secretarial Order](#) to “expand recreational and conservation opportunities,” specifically to expand recreational hunting, fishing, and boating access on federal lands where these might currently be restricted.

**March 2 – Final Regulation Change:** Interior Secretary Zinke signs a [Secretarial Order](#) overturning a ban on lead in ammunition and fishing tackle in National Wildlife Refuges. This ban, [signed into effect](#) in the waning hours of the Obama administration, restricted the use of lead which accumulates in wetlands and is known to poison waterfowl that often are the prime focus for conservation on many National Wildlife Refuges.

**March 3 – Final Regulation Change:** EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt announces he will [stop collecting methane emissions data](#) from 15,000 oil and gas companies. Methane is a greenhouse gas that is [72 times more potent than carbon dioxide](#) in terms of trapping heat in the atmosphere over a 20-year time horizon. In May 2016, the EPA had issued a [series of three rules](#) to curb emissions of methane, volatile organic compounds (which create the ozone that forms smog) and benzene from new, reconstructed, and modified oil and gas facilities. On May 10<sup>th</sup>, Congress [declined to repeal the methane rule](#) under the Congressional Review Act for lack of a sufficient number of votes in favor of the repeal.

**March 15 – Policy Change:** Trump proposes a 31% cut o EPA funding and [laying off 3,500 EPA employees](#) in proposed budget. Trump’s budget proposal subsequently [fails to be enacted](#) by Congress.

**March 15 – Initiating Regulation Change:** EPA announces it will [reconsider emissions standards](#) on passenger cars and light trucks. Relaxing these standards will likely result in cars and light trucks with lower gas mileage and greater air pollution emissions.

**March 16 – Policy Change:** Secretary Zinke proposes to [slash \\$1.6 billion](#) from the Interior Department budget, which funds the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This proposal is not enacted by Congress.

**March 27 – Law Change:** President Trump [signs a congressional resolution](#) that [repeals the Planning 2.0 Rule](#) governing Bureau of Land Management (BLM) using the Congressional Review Act. This Obama-era amendment to BLM planning regulations provided for greater collaboration with local governments in federal land-use planning, encouraged cooperative planning by adjacent BLM offices across political boundaries to facilitate the management of wildlife migration corridors, and gave the public a greater say in the early part of the planning process.

**March 28 – Initiating Regulation Change:** President issues an [Executive Order](#) rescinding Obama’s Climate Action Plan and Climate Action Plan Strategy to Reduce Methane Emissions Presidential Reports. In addition, Trump’s Executive Order revokes an Obama Executive Order on preparing the U.S. for the impacts of climate change, two 2013 Presidential Memorandums on power sector carbon pollution standards and resource mitigation, and the Council on Environmental Quality’s greenhouse gas emissions and climate change guidance. It also orders review of the Obama-era Clean Power Plan and “all agency actions that potentially burden the safe, efficient development of domestic energy resources.”

**March 29 – Final Regulation Change:** Interior Secretary Zinke issues a [Secretarial Order](#) reversing a 2016 moratorium on federal coal leasing. Zinke also signs a second [Secretarial Order](#) revoking an Obama-era Secretarial Order to improve Department of Interior environmental mitigation policies and procedures. It additionally orders review of Department of Interior climate change policies and mitigation policies. Mitigation is the actions taken to avoid, reduce, and rectify other environmentally harmful actions. Department of Interior agencies typically require mitigation as a condition of project approvals on federal lands.

**March 29 – Final Regulation Change:** EPA Administrator Pruitt [denies petition](#) to ban the neurotoxin pesticide chlorpyrifos, despite [EPA studies](#) showing that it harms brain development in children.

**April 3 – Law Change:** Trump signs bill [overturning a ban on killing wolf pups and hibernating bears](#) in their dens near National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska. These practices were [banned in 2016](#) in National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska.

**April 12 – Rep. Raul Grijalva and conservationists [file a lawsuit](#) to compel the Trump administration to consider the environmental impact of the proposed border wall. The lawsuit alleges that the Department of Homeland Security has [never conducted any analysis](#) of the environmental impacts of its border security installations and activities, and that the border wall poses a major barrier to wildlife migrations and movements.**

**April 13 – Initiating Regulation Change:** EPA announces it will [reconsider power plant emissions rules](#) restricting heavy metal contamination of waterways.

**April 14** – BLM announces the upcoming [auction of oil and gas leases for the Sheeprocks sage-grouse population](#), which had decreased by nearly 40% in four years. The lease auction encompasses 14,943 acres of public land in Utah. The lease area includes important habitat. The lease sale directly contradicts a [February 2017 press release](#) in which the BLM vowed to manage Sheeprocks habitat to prevent further population decreases. Conservation groups subsequently filed a [legal appeal](#) on October 31.

**April 19** – **Initiating Regulation Change:** EPA announces it will [reconsider regulations restricting pollutant emissions](#) from oil and gas industry sources, and delay implementation of the current regulations.

**April 22** – **Policy Change:** President Trump issues an [Earth Day statement](#) stating "My administration is committed to advancing scientific research that leads to a better understanding of our environment and of environmental risks," as [100,000 protestors](#) gather in the rain in Washington D.C. for the March for Science (part of 1.1 million protestors worldwide) to protest dismantling of scientific integrity at federal agencies.

**April 26** – **Initiating Regulation Change:** President signs Executive Order calling for a [review of all large National Monuments](#) designated since 1992. In a signing ceremony, President Trump characterized Monument designations as "[a massive land grab](#)" (even though the lands in question have always been owned by the federal government, and Monument designation involves only a change in federal land management that does not apply to private and state lands). During this review process, the Trump administration received [more than 2.8 million public comments](#), 99.2% of which opposed any reductions in national Monument protections.

**April 27** – **Initiating Regulation Change:** President Trump signs [Executive Order](#) mandating review of national marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments designated or expanded in the previous 10 years, as well as review offshore oil and gas leasing. It reverses the [previous ban on drilling](#) in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas off Alaska and in portions of the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, the Order restricts the Secretary of Commerce's ability to create or expand national marine sanctuaries.

**April 29** – EPA [shuts down climate change webpage](#). Parts of the page later reappeared, but with [references to climate change removed](#).

**May 23** – New proposed budget proposed by Trump administration would [cut 12% from the Department of Interior budget](#), including [cuts](#) to the popular Land and Water Conservation Fund and funding cuts to state wildlife management programs.

**June 1** – **Policy Change:** President announces [U.S. withdrawal](#) from Paris Climate Accord. The accord has a [four-year withdrawal process](#), so the announcement has no immediate effect. U.S. Carbon emissions have been [substantially lower](#) than the expected 1% per year growth rate, and as of 2016 were 13.7% below 2005 levels. [States representing almost half the U.S. population](#) have committed to implementing policy changes to meet Paris Accord targets, so the United

States may yet meet its targets even if our nation ultimately exits the agreement. When [Syria joined](#) the Paris Climate Accord in November, the United States stands to become the only nation in the world that is not a signatory.

**June 5 – Final Regulation Change:** EPA announces a [one-year delay](#) in implementing the 2015 ozone pollution rule. Some [16 states filed suit](#) to overturn the delay on August 1, and on August 2 the EPA reversed itself and [resumed implementation](#) of the ozone rule.

**June 7 – Initiating Regulation Change:** Interior Secretary Zinke announces a [‘review’ of federal sage-grouse plans](#), adopted in 2015 after a multi-year public planning process. The existing [plans formed the basis](#) for a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision to deny listing under the Endangered Species Act for the bird. The plans are [hailed as “collaborative”](#) by some, while the conservation groups most heavily involved in sage-grouse issues [criticized the plans](#) as insufficient for departing from science-based habitat protections in order to win the approval of western state governors.

**July 9 –** German Chancellor Angela Merkel [rebukes Trump](#) at G20 Summit for pulling out of Paris Climate Accord.

**June 13 – Final Regulation Change:** The EPA announces a [two-year pause on regulations](#) that would reduce air pollution from oil and gas industry facilities, despite acknowledging in the [official notice](#) that the stay could harm children’s health.

**June 15 – Personnel Change:** Interior Secretary Zinke undertakes a [major shakeup of employees](#), reassigning key career professionals including top climate policy official Joel Clement, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regional directors, and Bureau of Indian Affairs officials. Moves of this sort are typically politically-motivated efforts to sideline influential career professionals whose views and priorities are perceived as out-of-alignment with the policies of the new administration. A former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director characterized the scale of the transfers as “unprecedented.”

**June 22 – Final Regulation Change:** Interior Secretary Zinke announces a [rule to de-list Yellowstone grizzly bears](#) from protection under the Endangered Species Act. [Conservation groups file Notices of Intent](#) to initiate lawsuits challenging the de-listing. Ultimately, [five separate lawsuits](#) are filed challenging the decision by conservation groups, animal rights organizations, and Native American tribes. In December, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announces it will unilaterally [review the legality of the de-listing decision](#) in light of an earlier legal precedent in which the de-listing of the Western Great Lakes population of wolves was overturned by a federal court.

**June 27 – Final Regulation Change:** EPA announces it will [scrap the Clean Water Rule](#), established to determine which streams, lakes, and wetlands are protected under the Clean Water Act.

**June 30 – Policy Change:** President Trump [announces](#) policy of ‘energy dominance.’

**July 19 - Personnel Change:** Former top-ranking Interior climate policy official Joel Clement [files a whistleblower complaint](#) with the Office of Special Counsel claiming that his involuntary reassignment put Alaska Native communities at risk to health and safety threats, and that bringing these threats to the attention of superiors resulted in a retaliatory reassignment to an unrelated accounting position processing royalty checks from fossil fuel companies.

**July 20 – Policy Change:** Union of Concerned Scientists [releases report](#), ‘Silencing Science from Day One’ on Trump administration efforts to suppress science.

**August 2 – Final Regulation Change:** Department of Homeland security announces waiver of 37 environmental laws in construction of [border wall](#) prototypes.

**August 4 –** Former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger rolls out an [environmental legislative handbook](#), providing a blueprint for state governments to enact laws and regulations that President Trump repeals or undermines at the federal level.

**August 7 – Report:** Interior Secretary Zinke issues [recommendations for weakening Obama-era sage-grouse plans](#). The recommendations showcase a move toward previously discredited practices like predator control programs and captive breeding of sage grouse, and away from habitat protection regulations.

**August 7 – Report:** Draft climate report by 13 federal agencies is [leaked](#), concluding that human responsibility for climate change is “unambiguous.” Researchers expressed concern that the report would be [buried or watered down](#) by administration officials.

**August 10 – Initiating Regulation Change:** EPA and Department of Transportation announce [reconsideration of Clean Car Standards](#), which would reduce pollution and increased fuel efficiency, for model years 2022 through 2025. These standards are [projected to save consumers \\$92 billion at the pump](#).

**August 15 – Initiating Regulation Change:** Trump signs Executive Order [rolling back environmental rules on infrastructure](#) including oil and gas pipelines, which has [major implications](#) for flood and hurricane resilience.

**August 18 – Initiating Regulation Change:** EPA announces its intention to [reconsider greenhouse gas emissions and fuel economy standards](#) for medium and heavy engines in response to complaints from the trucking industry. These standards dated back to October 2016.

**August 20 – Personnel Change:** August 20 – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [disbands the federal advisory committee](#) that produces the National Climate Assessment, convened to [help cities prepare](#) for the effects of a changing climate and rising sea levels.

**August 21 – Personnel Change:** Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue selects [Tony Tooke to be the new Chief of the U.S. Forest Service](#) (USFS). He is viewed by conservation groups as a



[continuation of the collaborative approach](#) to National Forest management undertaken under the previous Chief Tom Tidwell. Tooke was previously the USFS Regional Forester for the Southern Region, and had also served as Associate Deputy Chief in Washington, DC. His background in the agency is in silviculture and timber management, which emphasizes logging and lumber production.

**August 23 – Personnel Change:** Science Envoy for the Department of State Daniel Kammen [resigns in protest](#) of the Trump administration’s announced withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, failure to condemn white supremacists and neo-Nazis in the wake of the Charlottesville rally, and undermining of environmental and energy research.

**September 14 – Initiating Regulation Change:** President’s Council on Environmental Quality to [change regulations](#) applying the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to infrastructure projects.

**September 17 – Report:** Interior Secretary Zinke’s [report on the National Monuments review](#) is leaked to the public, featuring recommendations to reduce four National Monuments, and modify six others. Among the recommendations are to change National Monument core management to prioritize “traditional uses” like logging, mining, livestock grazing, and oil and gas drilling even though these commercial uses are often incompatible with protecting the historical and scientifically significant features for which the National Monuments were established under the Antiquities Act.

**October 5 – Policy Change:** The Washington Post [exposes behind-the-scenes meetings](#) between the Department of the Interior and western local governments to weaken environmental rules and give local officials more control of federal land decisions.

**October 6 – Personnel Change:** Joel Clement, former top Interior Department climate policy official under the Obama administration, [resigns in protest](#). His [resignation letter](#) cites poor leadership within the Department of the Interior, retaliation against employees who raised health and safety concerns, elimination or undermining of environmental policies and regulations, and pervasive denial of climate change as a human-caused problem.

**October 8 – Initiating Regulation Change:** EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt announces the commencement of [repeal of Clean Power Plan](#), designed to reduce power plant emissions of greenhouse gases.

**October 11 –** The Bureau of Land Management [cancels the closure of 10 million acres of prime sage grouse habitat to mining claims](#), public lands that had been designated as Sagebrush Focal Areas and accorded the highest level of habitat protection under the Obama-era sage-grouse plans. The Obama administration had begun the withdrawal process and initiated an Environmental Impact Statement process, but due to agency foot-dragging, the process was not completed before the change in administration, leaving the mineral withdrawal vulnerable to repeal.

**October 12 – Personnel Change:** President Trump [nominates Kathleen Hartnett-White](#), a noted climate skeptic, to head the Council on Environmental Quality. Her [nomination was denied](#) and sent back to the White House on December 22.

**October 12 – Final Regulation Change:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [denies Endangered Species Act protections](#) to the Pacific walrus, [threatened by climate change](#), the Northern Rocky Mountain fisher, [threatened by trapping and by logging](#) of its old-growth forest habitats, and 23 other rare species.

**October 23 – Final Regulation Change:** Department of Interior announces [largest-ever oil and gas lease auction](#) of federal minerals, covering 77 million acres of offshore deposits in the Gulf of Mexico. The sale area includes [all unleased acres available](#) on the Gulf’s Outer Continental Shelf, and [reportedly includes](#) the site of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, considered by some to be [the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history](#).

**October 23 – Initiating Regulation Change:** National Marine Fisheries Service proposes to [list the chambered nautilus](#), a free-swimming but shell-dwelling cephalopod resembling a squid, as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This species inhabits deep waters associated with coral reefs in tropical reaches of the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

**October 24 – Initiating Regulation Change:** The National Park Service announces a plan for [major entrance fee increases](#) at 17 of its most popular National Parks. The National Parks Conservation Association [criticized the proposal](#) because it would create “a serious financial barrier for many families.”

**October 25 – Policy Change:** Interior Secretary Zinke release an [Energy Burdens Report](#), identifying federal [environmental protections](#) that reduce the nation’s “energy dominance” and will be targeted for elimination. The report specifically identifies oil, gas, and nuclear energy production as priorities. Conservationists immediately criticize the report as promoting “[special-interest giveaways](#)” at the expense of public lands and a healthy environment.

**October 25 – Policy Change:** Interior Secretary Zinke [establishes an Executive Committee for Expedited Permitting](#) by Secretarial Order, which is tasked with fast-tracking energy development and implementing the policy directives to advance domestic energy production.

**November 16 – Initiating Regulation Change:** [EPA announces](#) its intention to repeal emissions standards for glider trucks, [which pair older, more polluting diesel engines](#) with new truck bodies. The repeal would allow glider trucks to [avoid complying with Clean Air Act](#) emissions standards.

**December 4 – Final Regulation Change:** Trump signs Executive Order [slashing size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase – Escalante National Monuments](#), eliminating protections for [over 2 million acres](#). [Legal scholars](#) point out that the President can create or expand National Monuments under the law, but cannot reduce or eliminate them; tribes, conservationists, the outdoor industry, and paleontologists [immediately sue](#).

**December 4 – Final Regulation Change:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service finalizes a [deeply flawed Mexican wolf recovery plan](#). The recovery plan relies heavily on wolf populations in Mexico, which are unlikely to thrive due to the prevalence of private rangelands, and stand to be isolated from U.S. wolf populations by the border wall. The recovery plan also excludes Mexican wolves from suitable habitats north of Interstate Highway 40, an artificial political boundary driven by livestock industry opposition to wolf conservation. Conservation groups immediately file [Notices of Intent to launch lawsuits](#) challenging the recovery plan.

**December 4 – Final Regulation Change:** Department of Transportation [reverses a rule](#) that required large trains hauling highly flammable substances such as crude oil and ethanol to [install special safety brakes or operate at reduced speeds](#). Oil trains pass through communities across the U.S. and have a [history of dangerous crashes](#), including a [2016 derailment and fire](#) in the Columbia River Gorge.

**December 6 – Final Regulation Change:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [denies ESA listing](#) for the blackfin sucker, Mohave shoulderband snail, white-tailed prairie dog, and Woodville Karst cave crayfish. The white-tailed prairie dog is of particular conservation interest because it is a [keystone species](#) of sagebrush steppe habitats, supporting the survival of the endangered black-footed ferret, the rare burrowing owl, and many other species.

**December 9 – Initiating Regulation Change:** Interior Secretary Zinke announces plan to [build an 11-mile road through Alaska’s Izembek National Wildlife Refuge](#), which would destroy wilderness and cause “irreparable damage” to wildlife, according to federal environmental impact studies.

**December 15 – Policy Change:** The public learns that Centers for Disease Control are [banned from using “evidence-based” and “science-based”](#) in official documents. The ban [might have already gone into effect](#) by the time Trump’s proposed 2018 budget was submitted to Congress.

**December 18 – Policy Change:** President Trump’s first [National Security Strategy](#) is announced. It [drops climate change](#) as a national security threat, instead promoting increased U.S. energy production of all types, including greenhouse-gas emitting fossil fuels.

**December 20 – Initiating Regulation Change:** President Trump signs [Executive Order 13187](#), which orders “streamlining” of leasing and permitting processes related to exploration, production, reprocessing, recycling, and domestic refining of critical minerals. Which minerals get the reduced environmental protections that come with “streamlining” are not identified in the Order, but will be named within 60 days by Secretary Zinke. They are [expected to include](#) rare earth elements, which have a [track record](#) of [serious environmental impacts](#), including radioactive waste products and water contamination.

**December 21 – Initiating Regulation Change:** Secretary Zinke signs [Secretarial Order 3359](#), which implements Executive Order 13187 on critical minerals mining. It requires federal land management agencies to provide Secretary Zinke with recommendations to open up lands,

“streamline” permitting and review, and “otherwise increase critical mineral discovery, production, and domestic refining” within 60 days of Executive Order 13187.

**December 21 – Final Regulation Change:** The Bureau of Land Management [voids the Obama-era Planning 2.0 Rule](#), “as if it had never taken effect.” BLM planning regulations revert to a 2005 land-use planning [handbook](#).

**December 23 – Law Change:** President Trump signs a tax overhaul bill that includes a provision [opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas leasing](#). The Arctic Refuge is [rich in wildlife](#) and provides the crucial calving range for the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which undertakes the [longest land migration](#) in North America and provides the [primary subsistence of the Gwich'in peoples](#) of interior Alaska. Conservation groups immediately threaten [protracted legal battles](#) over leasing and drilling in the National Wildlife Refuge.

**December 26 – Final Regulation Change:** Interior Department issues a Solicitor’s Opinion stating that it will [stop enforcing the Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#) in cases where corporations kill birds without deliberately seeking to cause their deaths. The Opinion reverses four decades of federal policy that has resulted in the prosecution of [oil](#), [mining](#), [utility](#), [wind energy](#), and [chemical](#) companies that did not take reasonable steps to protect birds from lethal threats. The Opinion applies to more than 1,000 U.S. native bird species, as well as their nests and eggs. Without fear of prosecution, federal agencies have lost the incentive they have used to convince companies to protect birds and their young at industrial facilities.

**December 29 – Final Regulation Change:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) [denies ESA protection](#) to the beaverpond marstonia, a freshwater snail in Georgia, as no specimens were found in the three known locations where the species occurred and the agency deemed this species extinct. In the same rule, USFWS denies a petition to remove ESA protections from the southwest willow flycatcher, a bird that dwells in streamside shrub woodlands.

**December 29 – Personnel Change:** Director of the BLM and Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are two of the key positions for environmental policy that remain unfilled. Given the tenor of President Trumps previous nominees, the fact that these positions remain unfilled is likely beneficial to wildlife, the environment, and the public lands.