

From: Hinson, Alex
Sent: 2017-09-18T08:18:28-04:00
Importance: Normal
Subject: *News Alert* Interior Report Recommends Cuts or Changes to Seven National Land Monuments
Received: 2017-09-18T08:18:37-04:00

Wall Street Journal: Interior Report Recommends Cuts or Changes to Seven National Land Monuments

Jim Carlton

September 17, 2017

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has recommended cutbacks or other changes to nearly half the geographic national monuments he recently reviewed at the request of President Donald Trump, according to a report sent to the White House and reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

The report recommends reducing the boundaries of the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante preserves in Utah, and reopening hundreds of thousands of square miles of protected oceans in both the Pacific and Atlantic to commercial fishing—in actions numerous environmental groups would likely fight to block.

Those are the findings in a report the secretary sent to Mr. Trump in August. The details of the report weren't released at the time.

Officials at the Interior Department referred requests for comment to the White House, which declined to comment.

"The Trump administration does not comment on leaked documents, especially internal drafts which are still under review by the president and relevant agencies," White House spokeswoman Kelly Love said in a statement Sunday.

Besides Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante, the list of land monuments recommended for downsizing or otherwise made less restrictive—including by allowing traditional activities including ranching and logging—are Oregon's Cascade-Siskiyou; Nevada's Gold Butte; Maine's Katahdin; and New Mexico's Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks and Rio Grande Del Norte. The ocean preserves Mr. Zinke wants reopened to commercial fishing include Northeast Canyons and Seamounts off the Massachusetts coast and both Rose Atoll and the Pacific Remote Islands.

Mr. Zinke recommended no changes to 17 other national monuments that the president included in the review, which he ordered after complaining some of his predecessors had locked up too much land and water in the preserves that can be created by presidents or Congress under the Antiquities Act of 1906. Most of the monuments that Mr. Zinke reviewed were created by two of Mr. Trump's Democratic predecessors, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton.

If the president acts on the recommendations, they could have enormous economic implications in areas around the monuments.

For example, huge fisheries could reopen in both the Atlantic and Pacific. Prior to a nearly

600,000-square-mile area being created as the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument by the George W. Bush and Obama administrations, the region was a major fishery for Hawaii and Samoa, Mr. Zinke said in his report. Along with the two other marine monuments he singled out for change, he asked the president to take actions including through boundary reductions to allow most commercial fishing to resume.

Similarly, a reduction in the size of Utah's 1.9-million acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument—which was established by Mr. Clinton in 1996—could open that area of canyons to coal and oil exploration. The report notes that the monument contains “an estimated several billion tons of oil and large oil deposits.”

Mr. Zinke also said traditional activities such as ranching and logging would be better protected by reducing acreages or making other changes at Oregon's Cascade-Siskiyou, Nevada's Gold Butte and New Mexico's Rio Grande Del Norte national monuments.

And in the case of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in southern New Mexico, Mr. Zinke recommended the president amend that preserve to, among other things, to lift motorized restrictions in areas close to the U.S.-Mexican border for national security reasons.

Mr. Zinke told the president his agency had received about 2.6 million comments about the monument, review but that most were from campaigns organized by environmental groups. He made a point during his personal tours of some of the monuments to meet with residents of nearby, rural areas who he said had not been adequately represented when the monuments were created.

“Too often, it is the local stakeholders who lack the organization, funding and institutional support to compete with well-funded NGOs (non-governmental organizations),” he wrote.

Mr. Zinke also recommended the president request congressional authority to enable tribal co-management of sensitive cultural areas, such as Native-American artifacts in the Gold Butte monument.

And he suggested the president establish three national monuments of his own: two representing buildings in Kentucky and Mississippi involved in African-American history, and a 130,000-acre natural area along Montana's Rocky Mountain Front important to the Blackfeet tribe called Badger-Two Medicine.

Environmental groups and their supporters said the president doesn't have the legal authority to significantly alter national monuments, and pledged to fight him in court if he follows through on the recommendations.

“Secretary Zinke's recommendations would amount to the largest elimination of protections for public lands and wildlife habitat in U.S. history,” said Matt Lee-Ashley, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, a left-leaning think tank. “All told, this proposal—if implemented—would result in an area several times the size of Yosemite National Park being turned over for mining, drilling, and logging.”

Corrections & Amplifications:

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has recommended cutbacks or other changes to nearly half the geographic national monuments he recently reviewed. An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated he recommended cutbacks or changes to nearly half the national land monuments. (Sept. 17, 2017)

###

--

Alex Hinson

Deputy Press Secretary
Department of the Interior
C: 202-641-5381