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Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

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<http://bit.ly/2sZy2I6>

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Kellie Lunney, E&E News reporter

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

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reassignments of senior executives over the last month as part of a larger-scale department reorganization.

<http://bit.ly/2usgIjk>

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Geof Koss and George Cahlink, E&E News reporters

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<http://bit.ly/2tROXyY>

4. Western GOP senators urge vote on Bernhardt

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

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<http://bit.ly/2v10eLQ>

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<http://bit.ly/2uiIO05>

8. Colo. still compiling info of pipelines near homes

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Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

As Colorado regulators continue a first-of-its-kind inventory of oil and gas infrastructure located near homes, pressure is building on the state to make the information clearer and more accessible.

<http://bit.ly/2uiIyOl>

9. White House official: U.S. is 'constructive' on climate

Jean Chemnick, E&E News reporter Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

Divisions over climate and energy weren't as deep as they seemed at last week's Group of 20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, a White House official said yesterday.

<http://bit.ly/2v0REwZ>

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1. Zinke to tour Ore. site to weigh possible reductions

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke is set to visit Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument this weekend, as he prepares to recommend potential rescissions to the 100,000-acre site, which straddles southern Oregon and Northern California.

Congressional lawmakers have split over the Cascade-Siskiyou monument along party lines. Oregon's Democratic senators have pressed the Trump administration to refrain from making changes, while House Natural Resources Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) has vowed to "undo the damage" of a decision by President Obama to nearly double the size of the monument during his final weeks in office (E&E News PM, Jan. 13).

President Clinton first established the site in 2000, marking the first time a monument had been created with the sole intention of protecting biodiversity. Obama added an additional 42,000 acres in Oregon and 5,000 acres in California in late 2016.

During his visit to Oregon, Zinke will meet with Gov. Kate Brown (D), the Klamath Tribes, the Soda Mountain Wilderness Council, local Bureau of Land Management officials and council commissioners.

The site is faced with potential reductions as part of Zinke's ongoing review of dozens of national monuments nationwide.

Trump issued an executive order in late April mandating an assessment of all monuments created since 1996 that include more than 100,000 acres for potential elimination, reductions or changes to management plans.

Zinke has already issued one recommendation calling for significant reductions to the 1.35-million-acre Bears Ears National Monument in southeast Utah. Yesterday, he announced he would not call for changes to Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve in Idaho or Hanford Reach National Monument in Washington state.

The Cascade-Siskiyou monument is among the 24 monuments that Zinke has yet to make any public pronouncements about. He is set to file a final report Aug. 24.

Meeting concerns, lawsuits

In a letter to the Department of Justice yesterday, conservation groups raised concerns that Zinke would meet with representatives of the timber industry who have filed lawsuits over the monument's expansion.

"While we welcome Secretary Zinke's visit to Oregon to view first-hand the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, the Secretary has only arranged to ... talk extensively with Monument opponents," Earthjustice staff attorney Kristen Boyles and Western Environmental Law Center staff attorney Susan Jane Brown wrote in the letter.

"Such a one-sided review is inappropriate and furthers the impression that the Secretary only values the opinions of Monument opponents. To the contrary, the Department of the Interior should represent all Americans, not just timber and county interests," the duo added.

The Justice Department is defending the Cascade-Siskiyou monument in the lawsuit filed by Oregon's Murphy Co. and Murphy Timber Investments LLC, which asserted that more than 80 percent of the new monument land is used for timber production.

Both Earthjustice and WELC are also defending the monument's expansion along with the government.

A federal judge postponed action in that case last month, however, pointing to the Trump administration's ongoing review. The Associated Press reported that the case will proceed with status reports from all parties in late September.

But Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum (D) has threatened a separate lawsuit should the Trump administration attempt to alter the monument's current boundaries.

"As you review the vibrant landscape within the Cascade-Siskiyou region, I know that you and the President will share our desire to preserve it for future generations," Rosenblum wrote in a letter to Zinke, first reported by Oregon Public Broadcasting. "However, if the President attempts instead to revoke or reduce the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, we stand ready to take appropriate legal action."

Conservationists and Democratic lawmakers have repeatedly asserted that Trump has no authority to eliminate monuments under the Antiquities Act of 1906, which allows presidents to protect lands with scientific, cultural or historic value.

Although presidents have previously reduced the size of monuments, no president has done so since the enactment of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, and legal scholars assert that such changes are no longer allowable (*Greenwire*, June 6).

<http://bit.ly/2sZy2l6>

2. Senate Democrat demands answers from Zinke on personnel moves

Kellie Lunney, E&E News reporter

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

A top Democratic appropriator is pressing Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke for details on dozens of reassignments of senior executives over the last month as part of a larger-scale department reorganization.

Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) sent Zinke a letter earlier this week seeking information on how many career senior executives Interior reassigned, why the department relocated them and how much it will cost the government.

Udall, ranking member of the Senate Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, said he was "deeply concerned" about the personnel moves, in part because the changes "are uprooting employees who have formed deep and lasting relationships with the surrounding communities" with "virtually no notice or input" from the affected communities.



Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.). Frank Fey/Wikipedia

"This subcommittee has no idea why these positions were selected for reassignment, or how moving these individuals out of their current positions improves management of the department," Udall wrote in the Tuesday letter. "We also don't know how these changes fit, if at all, into the larger workforce plan for the department that you've been directed by the Office of Management and Budget to assemble — a workforce plan not yet approved or submitted to the subcommittee."

President Trump directed agencies in March to craft reorganization plans as part of an executive order aimed at improving government efficiency; draft plans were due to OMB on June 30, but details are scarce.

An OMB spokesman said the workforce plans will be made public with the release of the administration's fiscal 2019 budget proposal, presumably early next year.

Udall and fellow appropriator Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) both told E&E News that Interior had not provided them with any details on its larger reorganization plan. Many federal employees live and work in Maryland.

The news that the department in late spring notified dozens of senior executives — including some in Udall's state of New Mexico — that they were being reassigned has rankled employees and lawmakers. While the department hewed to senior executive notification rules, some observers found the reassignments hasty, and not particularly transparent.

It's not clear how many Interior senior executives have received reassignment notices so far, but estimates range from 30 to 50 employees. A second round of reassignment notifications for other department senior executives is expected soon. Zinke said in late June that more details would emerge in "about 60 days or so" on the overall department reorganization (*E&E News PM*, June 20).

Udall wants answers to 13 specific questions in his letter, including the criteria used to determine the personnel reassignments, how reassigning retirement-eligible employees advances government efficiency, and whether the department properly notified and consulted with affected employees.

The New Mexico Democrat also wants to know how much the reassignments will cost the department and why Interior forged ahead with the personnel moves before its broader workforce development plan was shared with Congress and vetted by OMB.

"It is critical that this subcommittee better understands these personnel decisions, which carry with them real consequences, for both the employees who must now uproot their lives, and for the constituents with whom they've worked, often hand in hand for decades," Udall wrote.

Zinke has defended the decision, saying the department is shifting people to jobs where their skills are better suited, or moving them out of headquarters into the field, where there is greater need.

He also noted that reassigning senior executives is "not unprecedented." But it's not frequent, either. By statute, agencies can reassign senior executives provided they comply with the proper notification process, and senior executives know when they enter the Senior Executive Service that they are subject to involuntary reassignments.

In fact, the cadre of top career leaders was intended to be a mobile force, changing assignments as needed. President Obama issued an executive order during his second term aimed at reforming the SES; one of the recommendations involved moving senior executives around more to avoid complacency and improve management throughout the government.

Affected senior executives can either accept the reassignment or resign. They have the right to appeal a reassignment if they believe it was the result of discrimination or a prohibited personnel practice.

Interior did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Udall's letter.

<http://bit.ly/2usglik>

3. Even without budget, lawmakers race to finish spending bills

Geof Koss and George Cahlink, E&E News reporters

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

Senate and House appropriators continue to press ahead with their fiscal 2018 spending bills, despite lacking a broad bipartisan deal that would allow them to eventually become law.

Sen. Tom Udall of New Mexico, the top Democrat on the Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, said yesterday he expects that panel to mark up its fiscal 2018 bill "in the next week or so."

"We're still having discussions and working together, and most of our hearings have been pretty good in terms of fleshing out the issues, and I feel there's a lot of bipartisanship there," he said.

However, the lack of a top-line spending number — normally set in the budget resolution — is hampering efforts.

The full Senate Appropriations Committee yesterday advanced the fiscal 2018 military construction and Veteran Affairs bill, typically one of the less controversial spending measures.

Udall said drafters followed numbers set by the years-old Budget Control Act. Democrats unsuccessfully tried to increase the \$88.9 billion measure by \$1.6 billion, contingent on a new budget deal lifting spending caps in the coming weeks.

That agreement should include "parity" between defense and non-defense spending, Udall said. "That's how we negotiated last time," he said. "Eventually everybody came to the table and came up with a number."

Parity and the omission of contentious policy riders would again be the terms for a deal, Udall said. "We're sticking with those," he said.

While the fiscal 2017 Interior-Environment bill had a sizable number of riders, Democrats "were able to get them out for the omnibus," Udall noted.

"The best argument right now is, when you're dealing with an all-Republican Congress and all-Republican president, if they want to do things substantively they should do them in the authorizing committee and pass them," he said.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's (R-Ky.) decision to delay the start of the August recess for two weeks could help the appropriations process along, Udall said.

But if spending caps aren't determined "until well into August," that increases the likelihood of a continuing resolution to keep the government open in September, when the fiscal year ends.

"I'm not saying we're there yet, but the more you get backed up and don't have these numbers," the greater the odds are for a CR, Udall said.

House maneuvering

Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) said yesterday the House is "well ahead of schedule" for moving the spending bills with all 12 expected to be out of committee by next week (*see related story*). Ryan said he's now weighing options for moving them to the floor but did not offer a specific timeline.

A House leadership aide said it's possible some of the more bipartisan spending bills, covering the military and veterans, could be taken up before the chamber leaves for its summer break late this month.

Ryan said he's open to a bipartisan deal on spending with the Senate but suggested the House would adopt its own budget as a first step. The nonbinding plan sets overall spending for the year and usually is a prerequisite to appropriations bills moving to the floor.

"This is the classic legislative process. The House moves with its position, the Senate moves with theirs, and then we negotiate a compromise at the end of the day," said Ryan.

After weeks of delays, the House Budget Committee could mark up its fiscal 2018 budget resolution next week and then have it on the floor by the end of the month. Several markups have been postponed as conservatives have pressed for deeper cuts in mandatory spending and specifics on a future tax overhaul.

Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), chairman of the hard-right Freedom Caucus, said yesterday that \$200 billion in mandatory cuts over 10 years in a draft House budget proposal might not be enough if there are large increases in discretionary spending. He also said any tax provisions should not include the border adjustment tax, which he said won't fly in the Senate and would create false savings (*see related story*).

The House GOP caucus is due to huddle this morning to weigh its budget options and could finalize plans for a markup.

Democrats in both chambers, meanwhile, were quick to tout a new assessment of the White House fiscal 2018 spending blueprint released yesterday by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. It found President Trump's plan would reduce the deficit but not balance in 10 years as the administration predicted.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) called on the GOP to work with Democrats to come up with an alternative. "Instead of following down the president's road to ruin, House Republicans should join Democrats to pass a budget that creates jobs and raises wages for working families across America," she said.

<http://bit.ly/2tROXyY>

4. Western GOP senators urge vote on Bernhardt

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

Western Republican senators are amplifying their efforts to get lawyer and lobbyist David Bernhardt confirmed as the Interior Department's deputy secretary.

In a show of both force and frustration, seven GOP members of the Senate Western Caucus yesterday jointly blasted out their support for Bernhardt and their impatience with his seemingly slow confirmation.

"Unfortunately, a partisan minority in the Senate continues to block Mr. Bernhardt's nomination, and I hope that the confirmation process has not become a broken process that disincentives qualified people, like Mr. Bernhardt, who are held in high professional regard, from becoming public servants," Colorado Republican Sen. Cory Gardner said in a statement.

Republican Sen. Jeff Flake of Arizona added that "we need this experienced nominee confirmed without delay."

Pointedly, the seven Republicans cast Bernhardt's fate in the context of other Trump administration nominees. The senators noted that the Senate has confirmed 23 percent of Trump's 216 nominations. By August during President Obama's first term, the Senate had confirmed 69 percent of his 454 nominations.

The president himself, though, has been slow to nominate individuals, contributing to the home-alone experiences of many Cabinet secretaries. No nominees have yet been named for at least 12 of the top Interior Department positions requiring Senate confirmation, according to a tally by the nonpartisan Partnership for Public Service.

Bernhardt was nominated in late April and passed through the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on a 14-9 vote June 6 (*Greenwire*, June 6).

"We reported his nomination ... with bipartisan support more than a month ago, so I urge my colleagues to support the swift confirmation of this well-qualified nominee," said Sen. Lisa Murkowski, the Alaska Republican who chairs the Senate panel.

It could not be immediately determined late yesterday whether individual senators have explicitly placed a hold on Bernhardt's nomination, and a spokesperson for the ENR Committee referred questions about vote timing to Senate leadership.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has already announced a two-week delay in the start of the Senate's August recess, citing in part the need to confirm more of Trump's nominees.

Whatever the specific reasons for the handling of Bernhardt's confirmation, Democrats have made clear their unhappiness with the nominee, whose past clients have included the likes of California's politically potent Westlands Water District.

"I don't think he would provide the proper consideration and implementation of public policies that represent interests across the United States of America," said Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington, ENR's ranking Democrat.

<http://bit.ly/2v10eLQ>

5. Dems voice concern over land swap for mine

Nick Bowlin, E&E News reporter

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

Lawmakers discussed a land-transfer bill this morning to facilitate development of a controversial mine in northwestern Minnesota.

H.R. 3115, backed by Rep. Rick Nolan (D-Minn.), would accelerate an already-approved land exchange between the Forest Service and PolyMet Mining Corp. The company plans a copper-nickel project on a site within the Superior National Forest.

The agency approved the land deal in January, but several lawsuits from mine opponents have stalled the transaction. PolyMet owns the subsurface mineral rights, while the federal government holds the surface area.

Nolan presented his bill during a Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands hearing, calling it a "very good land exchange for citizens," noting a net gain for the Forest Service in acreage, lakeshore and wild rice land.

"It creates many, many good-paying jobs and facilitates mining of the kinds of minerals that are essential for our economy, for our national security, for a carbon-free footprint in the future," Nolan said, noting that wind farms require significant amounts of copper.

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Ranking member Colleen Hanabusa (D-Hawaii) noted in her opening statement the multiple legal challenges to the land transfer.

"We should be wary of tipping the scales towards one side when there is active litigation," she said, and submitted for the record letters from several Minnesota mine opponents: the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy and the Minnesota Environmental Partnership.

Other bills

The panel spent more time on H.R. 1547, a bill sponsored by Arizona Rep. Martha McSally (R) that would resolve a land dispute between the city of Tucson and Bureau of Land Management.

The government was supposed to transfer the land to the city back in 1989 but never formally did so, even though Tucson operated it as a park. In 2010, BLM informed the city it could not build a farmers market or a cell tower there.

Subcommittee Chairman Tom McClintock (R-Calif.) called for the officials who blocked the plans to be "held accountable."

The bill would direct the agency to complete the transfer without requiring the city to pay market value, given the city's investment in the parkland over the years.

"We've more than paid for the reversion," said Tucson City Manager Michael Ortega.

Interior Department official Tim Spisak said the agency had to block the projects by law, since it legally owned the property.

Separately, Spisak said the agency had no objection to H.R. 2582, from Utah GOP Rep. Mia Love, to facilitate a process for conveying 500 acres of BLM land to be used by state public schools.

The fourth bill on the agenda, H.R. 873, would establish a memorial in Washington to armed service members who served in the war on terror.

Current law prohibits building memorials until a decade after a war ends. Bill sponsor Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) argued that the war on terror is a different type of conflict and that the nearly 7,000 service members killed deserve remembrance.

"This war has no ending," he said.

The hearing saw the first subcommittee appearance of Montana Rep. Greg Gianforte (R), who won the May special election to fill the seat vacated by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. He briefly questioned a witness regarding the war memorial.

<http://bit.ly/2us9A6B>

6. Trump will fund solar energy research, for now

David Ferris, E&E News reporter

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

Will President Trump keep up the effort to make solar energy cheaper? That question has swirled around the SunShot Initiative, a program with a doubtful future under a new president who thinks the government has unfairly tipped the scales away from coal.

The answer is yes, though perhaps not for long. On Wednesday, SunShot announced \$46 million in new funding for universities and entrepreneurs, with an additional \$30 million expected next week.

The administration's stance toward solar power is mostly gloom. On Wednesday, Trump's press secretary, Sean Spicer, endorsed SunShot's new funding in a [tweet](#). On the other hand, the president's budget proposal would slash funding for the Solar Energy Technologies Office, whose main project is SunShot, from \$207 million to \$69 million. (In committee, the House has nudged it up to \$90 million.)

Charlie Gay, the director of SunShot, laughed when informed yesterday that he had been tweeted by one of the most powerful people in the White House. "Well, great," he said. "We need all the advocates we can find here."

SunShot believes its strategic funding since 2010 has helped to reduce the cost of solar power, though plummeting production costs in Asia have been the main driver. Utility-scale solar power dropped from 27 cents per kilowatt-hour to 7 cents last year, according to Department of Energy calculations.

Encouraged by the progress, SunShot set an ambitious new goal in November 2016, just as Trump won the election. It aims for utility-scale solar to reach 3 cents per kilowatt-hour by 2030. Even at today's prices, solar is cheap enough in many parts of the country to beat out coal and natural gas for power contracts.

The 3-cent goal has not changed under the new administration, Gay said.

This week's round of funding, which was set in motion while President Obama was still in office, went through a vetting process that the Trump administration has done for all energy projects. All parts of the SunShot plans survived unchanged, Gay said.

He said that's because SunShot's funding aligns with Trump's priorities. "The new administration's guidance here is to put emphasis on early-stage R&D," Gay said. "That's directly aligned with what we need to be doing."

The upper ranks of Trump's DOE, still mostly vacant as appointments languish, have signaled that early-stage funding is one of the few kinds of funding the administration likes.

The acting chief of the wing that oversees SunShot, the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, is Daniel Simmons, a scholar who has argued that renewable energy is too expensive and that some subsidies, like the department's loan-guarantee program, should be ended (*E&E News PM*, May 9).

The funding announced Tuesday invests from \$117,000 to \$2.5 million each on almost 50 projects, all of which put up some matching funds. The investments cover a broad range of ways to improve solar technology, as well as to commercialize ideas not yet tested in the marketplace.

After its awards of this week and next, SunShot has announced no other plans for funding.

<http://bit.ly/2usgoAS>

7. ConocoPhillips to mothball Alaska LNG plant

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

ConocoPhillips Co. will indefinitely postpone operations at its liquefied natural gas plant in Kenai, Alaska.

The company initially put the LNG plant on the market in 2016.

But since no buyers have come forward, the company will save expenses by mothballing the facility this fall.

The decision comes as ConocoPhillips faces increased competition in a world market awash in natural gas.

"Most people are fairly aware of the fact that worldwide the price of oil and gas has been low," said ConocoPhillips spokeswoman Amy Burnett.

"Over the last few years, more facilities have come online to export LNG," Burnett said. "So there are more sources available for the product, which makes competition more difficult" (Rashah McChesney, *Peninsula Clarion*, July 12). — **MJ**

<http://bit.ly/2uilo05>

8. Colo. still compiling info of pipelines near homes

[Mike Lee](#) and [Mike Soraghan](#), E&E News reporters

Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

As Colorado regulators continue a first-of-its-kind inventory of oil and gas infrastructure located near homes, pressure is building on the state to make the information clearer and more accessible.

The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, responding to a pipeline leak that destroyed a home and killed two people, ordered energy companies to turn over an inventory of all flow lines located within 1,000 feet of homes and other buildings. It also ordered companies to test the lines for leaks (*Energywire*, May 3).

The deadline to submit the information was June 30, but some companies have asked for extensions, and the COGCC has said it could take months to compile and publish all the information. Flaws in the data that have been released so far make it hard to gauge the impact on counties, cities or individual homes.

It's also not clear yet how well companies are complying with the COGCC's order on leak tests.

Those have become high-profile issues for homeowners in eastern Colorado, where simultaneous booms in housing and oil production have left tens of thousands of people living near pipelines and other equipment.

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"I'd like to see somebody map it," said Josh Joswick, a former county commissioner from western Colorado who now works for the environmental group Earthworks.

A bill in the state Legislature would've required the state to create a searchable database of the information. It was narrowly voted down just before the session ended in May, but it may be resurrected in 2018, said state Rep. Mike Foote, a Boulder Democrat who was one of its sponsors.

"That information is just gibberish unless it is put into an understandable format," Foote said in an email.

Turning over records

Flow lines are low-pressure lines that connect oil and gas wells to storage tanks and other equipment. They're common in older oil fields, where dozens of vertical wells are served by a single tank battery.

The suburbs north and east of Denver are dotted with tens of thousands of older wells, and the state never had clear maps of the flow lines that connect them. A lot of the same oil fields are now being redrilled using horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, which has increased the tension between homeowners and oil companies (*Energywire*, May 5).

The data released on the COGCC's [website](#) show blank entries for more than half the pipelines' test results, although several large companies have said that more than 99 percent of their lines passed.

The test results are even more important than the inventory data, and it's important to know what type of test was used, said Cornell University engineering professor Anthony Ingraffea.

"That's the kind of information I would expect to see in those blank columns," Ingraffea said.

The COGCC data show more than 248,000 flow lines and risers, but the true number of pipelines may be far different.

Anadarko Petroleum Corp., the biggest operator in Colorado, reported on its website that it turned in about 53,000 records to the COGCC, including individual pipelines and risers that connect the lines to wellheads and storage tanks. But the state agency's database shows 118,000 entries for Anadarko.

PDC Energy Inc., another large operator, reported testing 13,800 pipelines and risers, a spokeswoman said. The COGCC database shows more than 27,000 entries for PDC.

A spokeswoman for the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, which is the parent of the COGCC, said the commission is still processing hundreds of thousands of pieces of information, and it will take months to complete the process.

"In this undertaking, some of the data will be incomplete, contain errors and require follow-up to work through questions generated by what is submitted," Julie Murphy, assistant director of the Department of Natural Resources, said in an email.

Anadarko's response

The oil industry is leaving the door open to a mapping bill, while cautioning that any discussions should happen after the inventory and related tests are complete, according to the Colorado Oil and Gas Association.

"Any possible next steps, from a policy perspective, must be made with full understanding of what the data reveals," Scott Prestidge, a spokesman for the trade group, said in a statement. "Does a map ensure safety, or does validating pipeline integrity ensure safety? In other words, mapping may or may not be the answer. If mapping is part of the discussion, can it be done in a way that protects proprietary information and does not create new security or public safety risks?"

The explosion happened April 17 at a newly built home in Firestone, about 35 miles north of Denver. The home was part of a subdivision built on top of oil and gas wells that were drilled in the 1980s and 1990s. The area was laced with flow lines, some of which were relocated as the adjacent subdivision grew.

One of the pipelines was cut off just a few feet from the home's basement, and it was still connected to a gas well 178 feet away, investigators found.

Gas from the well migrated through the soil and built up in the home's basement. The owners, Mark and Erin Martinez, were home when the gas ignited. Mark Martinez was killed along with his brother-in-law, Joey Irwin. Erin Martinez was severely injured, and one of the couple's children was slightly injured after being blown out of an upstairs window.

Anadarko, which owns the well and the pipelines involved, shut down 3,000 old vertical wells while it conducted safety checks.

The company has tested 4,000 flow lines and found about 12 leaks, John Christiansen, a company spokesman, said in an interview. They've all been shut down.

The company also found 52 leaks in process pipelines, which connect equipment in a tank battery or processing plant, Christiansen said. Process pipelines pose less of a risk to surrounding homes because they typically don't run outside the boundaries of the installation they serve.

<http://bit.ly/2uilyOI>

9. White House official: U.S. is 'constructive' on climate

Jean Chemnick, E&E News reporter Published: Friday, July 14, 2017

Divisions over climate and energy weren't as deep as they seemed at last week's Group of 20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, a White House official said yesterday.

While the summit produced a text that isolated the United States in its opposition to the Paris Agreement and saw all 19 other members of the major economies club endorse a plan for addressing climate change, the official told reporters at a background briefing that the story is more nuanced.

"It was very cordial," the official said.

The U.S. negotiating team worked shoulder to shoulder with two of the Paris accord's staunchest backers, Germany and France, in an effort to iron out the differences. One late-night session saw French and U.S. negotiators sharing a bottle of German red wine as they worked to find agreement, he said.

Other delegations, meanwhile, were tempted to join the United States on some of its energy language before determining that it would be "just too much of a lift" to upset the communiqué's delicate balance.

The White House official, who attended the talks, said the most substantial point of disagreement between the United States and its 19 allies was the Paris Agreement — the landmark deal from which President Trump announced a U.S. withdrawal in June.

"It was about building a constructive discussion and having a good, positive interaction on energy and climate despite the differences over the Paris Agreement," the official said.

That isn't the story told by other countries at the summit. The conference's president, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, celebrated isolating the United States in the final text, by preventing other nations from signing onto U.S. language related to the Paris Agreement and expanded use of fossil fuels.

"We have not, as I said, been glossing this over," said Merkel in her closing press briefing Saturday evening. When it comes to climate change, she said, "it is very clear that there is a disagreement."

The White House official and European diplomats agree that the basic structure of the energy and climate language in the communiqué was agreed on before the summit. French and German "Sherpas," or negotiators, made separate visits to Washington, D.C., in the weeks before the summit to try to find a landing zone acceptable to all parties. There was agreement that the United States should not be a "footnote" in the text, as it had been in May in the Group of Seven communiqué, which came out prior to Trump's decision to leave Paris.

Does 'global approach' mean 'renegotiate'?

The solution that emerged is known as the "three-paragraph model": Items of consensus to all 20 member countries would appear in the top paragraph, followed by a U.S. section and then a "G-19" section that was agreed upon by everyone but the United States.

The White House official said the United States provided the German presidency with a menu of options for items to include in the communiqué.

European participants also met in Berlin two weeks before the Hamburg meeting to strategize. They agreed to not gloss over differences with the United States on climate — a goal Merkel repeatedly referred to in her closing press conference.

"Wherever there is no consensus that can be achieved, this disagreement has to be made clear," she said.

The Germans provisionally accepted language going into the talks stating that "the United States affirms its strong commitment to a global approach that limits emissions while supporting economic growth and

improving energy security needs." The White House had proposed that language to the Germans together with other items that did not make it into the initial text.

The White House official said the "global approach" language was included because the Germans wanted it to be included.

"If the Germans had not liked it, or had not been OK with it, they would have left it out of the base text," the official said.

Other delegations viewed the language as a suggestion by the United States to replace the Paris Agreement, since Trump had said he might like to "renegotiate" the accord.

The marginalization of the Paris Agreement raised hackles, though the White House official said those criticisms were mainly held by the French. The German presidency tried to restore harmony by cutting "global approach" from the language, but the U.S. team insisted that it be replaced with something else.

So the Germans added an endorsement of fossil fuel expansion in exchange for "global approach."

By Friday night, the draft text had a new sentence that read: "Given the importance of energy access and security in the nationally determined contributions of other countries, the United States of America will endeavor to work closely with other partners to help their access to and use of fossil fuels more cleanly and efficiently and help deploy renewable and other clean energy sources."

But European countries, including France, objected to that, too. They said a serious response to climate change is incompatible with an expansion of coal, natural gas and other carbon-intensive fuels. They also noted the lack of any reference to carbon capture and storage technology.

In the end, the language about fossil fuels was the last point of contention at the summit. It was finally agreed on by Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron. At the summit, Merkel spent her G-20 presidency walking a tightrope between losing the United States' presence in the communiqué and appearing too accommodating of the unpopular Trump. Later, she said the process was saved by a single word: "states."

"The United States of America states it will endeavour to work closely with other countries to help them access and use fossil fuels," begins the final version of that problematic sentence.

"It is absolutely clear that this is not a common position, but there is indeed a distinction," said Merkel.

'Existential challenge'

The point was further underlined, she said, by scrapping the word "partner" from the interim text and swapping in "countries" in the final version. The lost mention of "partners" for the United States made it clear that the United States was alone, the chancellor said.

"The concern we had was that when it is about further forms of cooperation, is that only about renewables, about low-carbon forms of technologies?" she volunteered during a break in her press conference. "How can we continue to cooperate, because the United States, as regards gas, as regards clean coal, they want to deliver this to developing countries, and it might well look then as if all of the others supported this, as well, and that's why we clearly stated that that was not the case."

The White House official said there was more cooperation than the communiqué reflects. A separate finance negotiating track saw Saudi Arabia and Russia join with the United States to cut language on

climate-related financial disclosures and green finance. The official said other countries were tempted to join the U.S. paragraph in the communiqué, too.

The meeting produced a joint statement, but whether it will result in comity on climate and energy remains to be seen.

Merkel has expressed no optimism that the United States will reconsider its plan to leave the Paris Agreement, and she takes a dim view of those who dispute man-made climate change.

"We must tackle this existential challenge, and we cannot wait until every last person on Earth has been convinced of the scientific proof," Merkel said at a pre-summit appearance in June.

Some European diplomats interviewed for this story took some comfort from Trump's decision to withdraw from Paris but stay in the U.N. climate talks. They noted that he joined other G-20 countries in pledging to "collaborate closely" on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which include climate.

And the United States' separate mention of helping other countries with their nationally determined contributions to Paris, though marred for some by the fossil fuels reference, nonetheless seemed to indicate future contributions of climate aid under Trump.

The White House official said that could be a reference to U.S. support through multilateral development banks and bilateral initiatives.

Trump has ruled out additional contributions to the United Nations' Green Climate Fund and other U.N. climate programs, but the official affirmed yesterday that the United States will retain its seat on the fund's board.

Trump returned to Europe this week for the Bastille Day holiday in Paris, where he said in a joint press conference with Macron yesterday that "something could happen" to prevent his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

Merkel told an audience in Paris yesterday that "maintaining contact [with the United States] — the ability to communicate — is, of course, important."

She left Paris without meeting with the U.S. president.

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