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Attached is the daily news report for March 23 24.

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DAILY NEWS REPORT - UTAH

UTAH – TOP STORIES – MARCH 23-24, 2017

1. Representatives, senators from Utah lead charge in Congress to repeal Obama-era BLM planning rule

The Times-Independent, March 23 | Molly Marcello

Congress has passed a resolution to repeal “Planning 2.0” — a resource management planning rule for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) developed during the Obama administration. Proponents of the rule, which had not yet been fully implemented, said it allowed additional opportunity for public input in planning efforts and considered more reasonable multiple-use objectives. Those in favor of its repeal argue the opposite, saying Planning 2.0 would have “devalued” local input and threatened to further restrict traditional western industries.

2. 9 Things to Know About Grand Staircase National Monument

San Juan Record, March 21 | Staff Writer

Grand Staircase – Escalante National Monument was created on September 18, 1996 by President Bill Clinton using the Antiquities Act. The designation was made from Grand Canyon National Park, more than 100 miles from the new 1.88 million-acre monument.

3. Monument a reality, for now

San Juan Record, March 21 | Bill Boyle

Beginning with the story on page 5, we are starting the process of looking at the national monuments near San Juan County that are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). They include Grand Staircase and Canyons of the Ancients.

4. Local climbers angered by decorating of Ancient Art spire

Moab Sun News, March 23 | Sam McLaughlin

Back in December 2016, an informal group of Moab climbers, slackliners, and BASE jumpers climbed up Ancient Art, the iconic twisted summit in the Fisher Towers area northeast of town. At the top, they draped Christmas lights and ornaments across the tower's sides, and posed with a flaming star for a photo. "Happy Holidays from the Moab Monkeys," the caption read.



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5. Citizens tell Kanab City Council NO on resolution to shrink the Monument

Southern Utah News, March 23 | Jeff Frey

After tabling the issue for two weeks so he could consider revisions to his Resolution 3-1-17 R, a resolution declaring Kanab City's support for identifying the areas within the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM) that do not meet the criteria of the Antiquities Act of 1906, Mayor Robert Houston brought a slightly condensed version of his initial proposal to the Kanab City Council meeting on March 14.

6. Utah: Mecca for ATV riders

The Standard Examiner, March 23 | Lynn R. Blamires

Being a flatlander, born and raised in Oklahoma, you might wonder what qualifies me to be an ATV writer.

7. Road to Understanding: Good relationship with federal land administrators is critical for Emery County success

KSL News, March 23 | Devon Dewey

CASTLE DALE, Emery County — Eight percent. That's all the private land for the entire 3 million acres of Emery County.

8. What its like to be a woman in wildland firefighting, adventurous recruits needed

St George News, March 24 | Julie Applegate

ST. GEORGE – Are you an adventurous woman looking for a new career? Then you might want to consider this opportunity: Dixie National Forest is recruiting women to fight wildfires, a calling one woman describes as having made her stronger mentally and physically, more confident and comfortable in all sorts of environments – and it even helped her get through college.



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9. Volunteers plan cleanup trip on lower section of San Juan River

The Times-Independent, March 24 | Rose Egelhoff

Tim Hunter describes the San Juan as “kind of a trashy river.” To address that problem, Hunter, a former river guide from Colorado, started leading cleanup trips on the San Juan more than 20 years ago. Now, he takes groups of 12 to 14 volunteers on a 10-day trip every spring before the boating season starts and every fall at the end of the season. The next trip will launch April 2.

10. Visit a sage grouse lek on April 8

Military-Technologies, March 24 | Military News

PRICE — One of the iconic native species of the West is the greater sage grouse. Every spring, these birds gather at sites adjacent to nesting grounds called leks, where the males put on elaborate displays of courtship characterized by strutting and unique vocalizations.

E&E/NATIONAL NEWS – TOP STORIES

1. Nevada lawmakers press BLM for public lands answers

The Washington Post, March 23 | Lisa Rein and Karin Brulliard

The Cabinet secretary who rode a horse to work on his first day is letting his employees bring their dogs to the office.

2. FBI posed as documentary filmmakers to conduct interviews with Bundy Ranch supporters

The Washington Times, March 24 | Andrew Blake

Undercover FBI agents disguised as documentary filmmakers were deployed to the Nevada desert in 2014 to speak with supporters of rancher Cliven Bundy amid an armed standoff with the federal government, an agent testified this week.



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3. WILDFIRES: In Colo., fire season is now a yearlong problem

E & E News, March 24 | Scott Streater

When the grass fire was first spotted in a vacant field early Sunday morning in Boulder County, Colo., it didn't come as much of a surprise to state and local fire officials, who quickly mobilized hundreds of firefighters to battle the blaze.

4. MINING: Labor Dept. moves to delay Obama-era safety rule

E & E News, March 24 | Dylan Brown

The Labor Department's Mine Safety and Health Administration announced today it wanted to delay new examination requirements at non-coal mines.

5. NATURAL RESOURCES: Interior to repeal Obama fossil fuel royalty rule

E & E News, March 24 | Dylan Brown

The Interior Department is working on repealing Obama-era changes to how coal, oil and natural gas are valued to calculate federal royalties.

6. REGULATIONS: Enviro law group releases blueprint for life under Trump

E & E News, March 24 | Arianna Skibell

The Environmental Law Institute has released a guide for navigating the Trump administration and Congress' deregulatory push.

7. PUBLIC LANDS: Senator says BLM should move West

E & E News, March 24 | Dennis Webb, Grand Junction [Colo.] Daily Sentinel

If U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner has his way, top-level decisions by a major federal public lands agency would no longer be made in Washington, D.C.



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8. KEYSTONE XL: Trump approves 'incredible' pipeline as greens prep lawsuit

E & E News, March 24 | Hannah Northey

President Trump announced federal approval for the Keystone XL oil pipeline this morning and signaled he will push Nebraska to grant the last permit TransCanada Corp. needs to finish the deeply controversial project to connect Canadian oil sands crude with Gulf Coast refineries.

9. FEDERAL AGENCIES: Lawmakers get behind open data bill

E & E News, March 24 | Kevin Bogardus

Republican and Democratic lawmakers yesterday expressed support for legislation to make government information more accessible.

10. INTERIOR: Inside the Trump admin's favorite conservation coalition

E & E News, March 24 | Corbin Hiar

On Ryan Zinke's first full day leading the Interior Department, he hosted top officials from more than a dozen sportsmen's groups — some of which were returning to the secretary's wood-paneled suite for the first time in years.

11. SUPREME COURT: Democrats attempt to block Gorsuch, set up Senate fight

E & E News, March 24 | Emily Holden

Senate Democrats will try to block Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch, even if it means Republicans decide to change the rules to confirm him.

12. NATURAL RESOURCES: Democrats summon Zinke to testify on budget

E & E News, March 24 | Pamela King

A group of Democratic lawmakers are calling on Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to explain how his agency would fulfill its responsibilities following a 12 percent budget cut.



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UTAH – FULL STORY

1. Representatives, senators from Utah lead charge in Congress to repeal Obama-era BLM planning rule

The Times-Independent, March 23 | Molly Marcello

Congress has passed a resolution to repeal “Planning 2.0” — a resource management planning rule for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) developed during the Obama administration. Proponents of the rule, which had not yet been fully implemented, said it allowed additional opportunity for public input in planning efforts and considered more reasonable multiple-use objectives. Those in favor of its repeal argue the opposite, saying Planning 2.0 would have “devalued” local input and threatened to further restrict traditional western industries.

All members of Utah’s congressional delegation lent their support to the repeal, which currently awaits President Donald Trump’s signature. The bill was co-sponsored in the U.S. House of Representatives by Utah Reps. Jason Chaffetz, Rob Bishop, Mia Love and Chris Stewart.

“The rule centralizes the resource management plan process in Washington, D.C., which devalues input from state and local governments as well as their stakeholders who know our lands and have expertise in managing them,” said Jennifer Scott, communications director for Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah).

But that viewpoint is confounding to many proponents of Planning 2.0, especially as its language mandated earlier and more frequent public involvement in planning efforts as well as ensured opportunities for other federal agencies, local governments, and stakeholders to be involved in decisions on land use.

“The talking point against these rules is that it shifts planning somehow to [Washington] D.C. I really don’t quite understand that,” said Nicholas Lund, senior manager for landscape conservation at the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA).

According to BLM documents, Planning 2.0 mandated more frequent public involvement in planning — including the ability to review preliminary versions of planning documents — as part of a larger strategy to respond to “environmental, economic and social changes” in a timely manner.



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“We felt that the improvements in Planning 2.0 really benefitted the public in terms of allowing people who actually use the land and have a stake in what goes on there, that they have a voice up front,” Lund said. “... Planning 2.0 has a reputation that its regulations are an Obama-era, lefty thing, but it really was a reaction to a process that was not working at all.”

Those who advocated for the repeal — a group that primarily includes individuals and groups involved in the energy development and agriculture industries — said they fought against what they saw as another federal hit to traditional western economies.

Randy Parker, CEO of the Utah Farm Bureau Association, was heavily involved in the drafting of Planning 2.0’s repeal. He said that under the BLM’s 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), the BLM gave “certain guarantees” that public lands would “continue to be important to western economies.” But as the agency amends FLPMA, Parker said, the agriculture industry experiences cuts and suspensions of grazing rights, a situation that many opponents believed would continue under Planning 2.0.

“We were concerned when you get to BLM 2.0 they would have even more authority to disregard local interests and could adversely impact grazing, energy and mining, and even recreation,” Parker said.

However, Steve Bloch, legal director of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, wondered if the opposition to Planning 2.0 really stemmed from issues of control between federal agencies and local government, as well as their traditional western industries.

“I think what is really behind [the repeal] is certain state and local governments like that they had a stranglehold on these federal agencies,” Bloch said.

He said certain aspects of Planning 2.0 were successful, noting that its mandate to involve the public “early and often” was incorporated during the Moab Master Leasing Plan (MLP) process. That mandate allowed the Moab MLP to receive overwhelming support from a variety of local stakeholders, Bloch said.

“I think the Moab Master Leasing Plan enjoyed broad support in Grand County. That’s an example of how Planning 2.0 works,” Bloch said. “The BLM held multiple meetings including a number of meetings in interim stages, informing the public about preliminary alternatives. The takeaway from Planning 2.0 was that more public involvement at earlier stages should result in better decision making.”



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During the Moab MLP process, the BLM reviewed more than 28,000 public comments regarding 785,000 acres of public land managed by the agency's Moab and Monticello field offices. According to BLM officials, the MLP guides "responsible" mineral development around Moab while also protecting natural resources and recreational opportunities.

Lisa Bryant, spokesperson for the BLM's Canyon Country District, which includes the Moab and Monticello offices, said the local field offices "see the value" of earlier and more frequent public participation. Although Planning 2.0 would have made that a standard practice, Bryant said local field offices will still implement that process in upcoming planning, including the San Rafael Desert MLP, initiated in spring 2016.

"We attribute the success of the Moab MLP to extensive collaborative efforts with stakeholders and the community, and it just makes good sense to continue offering opportunities for public engagement early and often in our planning," Bryant said.

But not everyone was happy with the mandates of the Moab MLP process, and some argued that it was another example of federal over-regulation. Opponents have cast Planning 2.0 in a similar light.

According to Kathleen Sgamma, president of Western Energy Alliance, Planning 2.0's regulations "would [have] negatively impact[ed] jobs and economic growth across the West without delivering better environmental protection."

Others disagree. Ashley Korenblat of the Moab-based Public Land Solutions, a nonprofit group heavily involved in the Moab MLP process, called Planning 2.0's repeal a "lose-lose" maneuver, arguing that its true value was lost on many lawmakers in Congress.

"Planning 2.0 on BLM lands would have made local input a bigger component of the land planning process — the very thing that our elected officials in Utah say they want," Korenblat said. "Rolling back 2.0 makes local input more difficult and will not create any new jobs, so the whole thing was a lose/lose maneuver by lawmakers who chose to view Planning 2.0 as more regulation, instead of taking the time to understand that 2.0 would have given them more local control."

Now, Lund says the NPCA is "bracing for what's next" with regard to public lands policy. He said conservationists expect to see more roadblocks to "thoughtful public participation" from Congress over the next few years.



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“We’re going to return to the era where things are dragged out in court forever and people feel their concerns aren’t being heard,” Lund said.

Proponents of the repeal, however, including Parker at the Utah Farm Bureau Association, believe the opposite.

“No longer will these be regulations in place by the BLM,” Parker said. “We’re getting back to where the local people do have rights and opportunities on these lands.”

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2. 9 Things to Know About Grand Staircase National Monument

San Juan Record, March 21 | Staff Writer

Grand Staircase – Escalante National Monument was created on September 18, 1996 by President Bill Clinton using the Antiquities Act. The designation was made from Grand Canyon National Park, more than 100 miles from the new 1.88 million-acre monument.

Much has happened in the 20 years since the designation, but the controversy still remains. The Utah State legislature recently approved a resolution calling for the sprawling monument (nearly 3,000 square miles) to be cut back.

The designation stopped development of large coal reserves on the Kaiparowits Plateau, altered the demographics of the small town of Escalante, and attracted visitors from near and far.

Grand Staircase is the first national monument to be managed by an agency other than the National Park Service (NPS). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages the monument through a headquarters office in Kanab.

As a multiple-use federal land agency, the BLM has a significantly different structural and management approach than the NPS.

1. Gates, Fees, Restrictions

There is no entrance fee or entrance gates into the monument. However, you must secure a free permit to camp overnight.

When the national Monument was created, the concept was to push all support services to area communities. As a result, support infrastructure is community-based rather than site-based.



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There are no new campgrounds within the national monument that didn't exist before the designation. Dispersed camping is allowed and RVs are okay.

In general, there is increased visitation over the past 20 years along the heavily-traveled main routes, but it is still wide open in the backcountry.

There are 880,000 acres in the 1.9 million acre monument that are designated Wilderness Study Areas (WSA). This is 46 percent of the entire monument. The designation did not impact the restrictions on WSAs.

The number of special recreation permits has grown dramatically over time. There were 35 permits in 1995 and 115 have been issued in 2017. These special recreation permits are for outfitters, guides, and special events.

The monument has a 15-member monument advisory committee.

2. Communities

Communities in the national monument have been impacted by the designation, with both sides arguing whether it is positive or negative. Traditional jobs have declined and tourism sector jobs have increased.

Population Comparison

Community populations from 1996 and 2014

Escalante went from 1,100 to 779, a 29% decrease

Kanab went from 3,878 to 4,468, a 15% increase

Cannonville went from 130 to 160, a 23% increase

Big Water went from 366 to 468, a 28% increase

Glendale went from 337 to 377, a 12% increase

Local

Monticello went from 1,876 to 1,975, a 5% increase

Blanding went from 3,521 to 3,581, a 2% increase

3. Escalante

Escalante is the community most impacted by the monument. Traditional community measures are devastated, with high school enrollment dropping 56% and a sawmill closing that once employed 65. At the same time, there is dynamic growth in tourism businesses.



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4. Employment

There are 51 permanent full-time employees of the monument and eight seasonal employees. The Kanab BLM field office is managed separately from the monument.

5. Visitor Centers

There are Grand Staircase NM visitor centers in Kanab, Escalante, Big Water, and Cannonville and a contact station in Glendale. Visitation to the visitor centers in 2016 totaled 189,551.

2016 Visitor Center Stops

Grand Staircase

Escalante : 76,179

Kanab : 44,479

Cannonville : 35,796

Big Water : 33,097

Local

Monticello Welcome Center : 22,564

Blanding Visitor Center : 26,118

Bluff Fort : 46,232

6. Grazing

While the continuation of traditional grazing is specifically mentioned in the monument proclamation, grazing issues are a source of contention between the monument and local residents.

The grazing plan for the area around the monument was developed in the 1980s, long before the 1996 monument designation. An overall management plan was created for the monument, but it did not change the grazing plan. The monument is currently in a public planning process to modify the livestock grazing management plan from the 1980s.

There are 79 active livestock grazing allotments within the monument. Overall permitted use within the monument is roughly the same level now as it has been since the early 1990s.

An AUM (Animal Unit Month) is the amount of forage needed to sustain a cow and calf, a horse, or five sheep or goats for a month. When the monument was created in 1996, there were 77,400 “permitted” AUMs within the monument boundaries. Soon afterward, the number dropped to 76,957.



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According to the BLM, permitted AUMs are the highest number that could be used under ideal conditions.

According to monument officials, the difference between permitted and actual UAM's is dependent primarily upon rangeland conditions. The actual use varies from year to year, depending upon the ability of the land to support livestock. This determination is often a source of conflict between rangeland managers and permit holders.

The number of actual UAM's has ranged from 54,560 in 2000 to 15,980 in 2003. Actual AUM's were between 40,000 and 50,000 in eleven of the previous 16 years. Average actual AUMs is 40,467 during that time.

Grazing in the adjacent Kanab BLM field office follows a similar pattern, ranging from a high of 12,597 in 2000 to a low of 5,250 in 2002. Overall, the actual AUM's in the Kanab field office averages 9,841 per year. The Kanab field office has 18,241 active AUM's. As a result, actual use is 53.9 percent of the "perfect-scenario".

The Grand Canyon Trust purchased several grazing allotments in the 1990s and apparently intended to retire the allotments. However, subsequent legal challenges require the Trust to continue to graze on the allotments that they purchased.

Many of the permit holders complain about the difficulty of making rangeland improvements on their allotments. These improvements are particularly difficult in Wilderness Study Areas because of restrictions to motorized vehicles.

7. Woodgathering

There are two designated fuelwood cutting areas within the monument, with approximately 19,200 acres near Kanab and an additional 4,800 acres near Cannonville. The management plan outlined key areas for fuelwood cutting. In addition, approximately 30,000 acres are under restoration effort with the goal of improving rangeland health.

8. Vandalism

There are reports of increased vandalism and graffiti within the monument, with names scratched into sandstone being the most common incident. In 2015, 1,234 square feet of defaced rock faces were restored.

In 2016, back country rangers responded to multiple incidents of vandalism and graffiti on cultural sites, as well as canyon walls.



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9. Visitation

The national monument reported 926,236 “visitor contacts” in 2016. Since there are no admission gates into the monument, determining actual visitation is often difficult.

Monument officials use six methods to count visitation, including foot and vehicle counters at key destinations, visitor center counts, fee envelope data, trailhead registers, and overnight permits in the back country database.

In 2016, there were record high visitor counts at Lower Calf Creek Falls (36,437), Devils Garden (27,802), Dry Fork Slot Canyons (27,647), Spencer Flat Road (15,275), Burr Trail (78,917), Grosvenor Arch (13,685), Paria Movie Set (19,099) and Toadstools Trailhead (18,765).

The most popular trailheads experienced at least 3,000 more hikers in 2016 than they did in 2015 and Dry Fork Slot Canyons received approximately 6,000 more hikers than the prior year.

2016 Visitation

Grand Staircase NM : 926,236

Natural Bridges NM : 101,843

Hovenweep NM : 42,862

Rainbow Bridge NM : 86,369

Glen Canyon NRA : 3,239,525

Canyonlands NP : 776,218

---Needles District : 160,496

Dead Horse Point SP : 403,737

Edge of the Cedars SP (paid) : 9,626

Goosenecks SP : 51,985

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3. Monument a reality, for now

San Juan Record, March 21 | Bill Boyle

Beginning with the story on page 5, we are starting the process of looking at the national monuments near San Juan County that are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). They include Grand Staircase and Canyons of the Ancients.



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As designated, Bears Ears NM will be managed by the BLM and US Forest Service. This represents a change since the other national monuments, parks and recreation areas in the area are managed by the National Park Service.

While Bears Ears is certainly different from Grand Staircase or Canyons of the Ancients, there are similarities. I hope that our efforts will help increase understanding of these important issues, even as we tackle several controversial topics.

Because of the uncertainty surrounding the designation of Bears Ears National Monument, and the yet-to-be-announced position of the Trump Administration, San Juan County has been in a suspended state since the December 28 designation.

However, the reality for the moment is that the monument is here. Visitors are arriving, as evidenced by the large number of visitors who rushed to the area at the first sign of spring-like weather.

Many local residents may not like it, but Bears Ears National Monument is a legal entity that includes more than 25 percent of the landmass of San Juan County.

I believe the controversy will very slowly move toward a political or judicial conclusion, but it may take years.

Until that conclusion plays out, it is not wise to simply pretend that it doesn't exist. The impacts exist, the visitors exist, the investors exist, and the monument exists.

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Many of those who support the Bears Ears National Monument want to discuss the public policy implications of the designation. They ask, "Is this good policy?"

I am sure that there were some great arguments about the public policy implications of the Stamp Act. But for local residents, and for the Colonists in 1776, this is much more fundamental than a discussion about public policy.

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In a Representative Democracy, citizens are given the privilege to vote. And then the winners of these elections are tasked with governing.



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These elected officials are chosen by the people to have direct responsibility over the land.

For a voter from San Juan County, the results of the elections are clear.

Simply put, every single elected official with direct responsibility over the land in the monument opposes the designation of Bears Ears National Monument.

This includes every commissioner, every state representative on the ballot (Hinkins and Noel), every statewide elected official (Herbert et.al), every federal representative on the ballot (Chaffetz, Lee and Hatch), and now apparently President Trump.

Should it be a surprise that local residents scratch their heads and wonder how it is that the fully united voice of our elected representatives does not seem to mean anything?

While environmental groups, industry advocates, neighboring sovereign nations and the elected officials who represent other areas should certainly have a voice, I (and many area residents) believe the voices of directly elected representatives should carry more weight than they did in the designation of Bears Ears National Monument.

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4. **Local climbers angered by decorating of Ancient Art spire**

Moab Sun News, March 23 | Sam McLaughlin

Back in December 2016, an informal group of Moab climbers, slackliners, and BASE jumpers climbed up Ancient Art, the iconic twisted summit in the Fisher Towers area northeast of town. At the top, they draped Christmas lights and ornaments across the tower's sides, and posed with a flaming star for a photo. "Happy Holidays from the Moab Monkeys," the caption read.

Three months later, a different subset of Moab climbers discovered the video of the stunt – which Climbing Magazine, among other websites, shared last year – and reignited a controversy over style, ethics and who can claim to represent the climbing community.

"It's highly disrespectful of Ancient Art and the Fisher Towers," said Kiley Miller, a climber and Moab-area resident for more than 20 years who saw the video earlier this month and passed it on to her friends. "It's just utter disregard for the area, and for the tower itself. In a sense, it's like desecration."



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"I feel very comfortable saying that a lot of the people who live around here, a lot of the climbers who have lived around here for a long time, do not think this is cool, do not think this is OK," Miller said.

But Andy Lewis – the internationally famous slackliner and BASE jumper known as "Sketchy Andy," who lives in Moab and coordinated the Christmas stunt – is unapologetic.

"The only reason why they're complaining about this is because for some reason they are jealous," Lewis said. "They think we're having too much fun, maybe."

"The style around being a climber is dying today," he added. "Unfortunately, I'm bringing style back."

Claims of BLM rules violations fall short

For at least one critic of the event, style wasn't the issue. Bill Love, a county resident who learned about the video from Miller, responded with an email to Lance Porter, district manager for the Bureau of Land Management, on March 7. The Fisher Towers are on BLM land, and Love pressed Porter to issue a citation.

The Moab Monkeys, Love wrote, "trashed BLM property by leaving Christmas ornaments around an area that is visited by hundreds of locals and tourists each year. Much of the trash has been removed by concerned citizens from the local area."

Love told the Moab Sun News that he had not personally seen any trash from the event, or spoken with anyone who had. The Sun News found two people who had posted on Climbing Magazine's website and the Mountain Project climbing forums about finding trash on the route.

Patrick Betts, a climbing guide who works in Colorado and Utah, said that he was taking a client up Ancient Art on Dec. 13, 2016. (The Monkeys filmed their video Dec. 9.) On his ascent, he found two large cardboard boxes from Christmas decorations, and saw glitter on the route.

"The stunt itself doesn't really bother me," Betts said. "My only real problem was the fact that they left obvious and large pieces of trash."

Betts said he climbed the tower again in the second week of March, and almost no glitter remained.



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Victor Colussi was on a personal trip to the Fisher Towers with his brother on Dec. 14. He, too, saw glitter on the route. He also found a cardboard box, and a half-empty bottle of Gatorade.

"I wasn't put off by the Christmas spirit, but the attitude in the video towards such a valuable and fragile resource was disconcerting," Colussi said.

Lewis said the boxes probably blew away during the descent.

"We did drop some boxes. I'll own up to that," Lewis said. "I'm sorry I dropped some boxes."

Other participants said the dropped boxes were a result of dismantling the project at night.

"We took everything down in complete darkness to make sure that we would not be in anyone's way," Taz, one of the climbers in the video and a freelance graphic designer in Moab, said.

She, Lewis and local photographer Scott Rogers all insisted their group carefully planned the project in accordance with Leave No Trace principles.

In a second email to the BLM, Love claimed the event required a commercial filming permit. But he told the Sun News he hadn't found any evidence that anyone had sold the pictures or video taken during the stunt. The BLM reached the same conclusion.

"It was not commercial, so there were no film permits required," agency spokesperson Lisa Bryant said.

The district's recreation and law enforcement staff looked into the video when it was first posted, Bryant said, and found "no violation of BLM regulations."

"While some people may not feel like that was a very tasteful stunt, there was nothing illegal about it," she said.

Ethics and personalities clash

But for other detractors of the stunt, legality was never the main issue.

"You don't turn spires into Christmas trees," Miller said. "This kind of behavior just promotes a circus mentality, and a lack of conservation and land ethics."



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Eve Tallman, who came to Moab in 1981 to climb and has lived in town since 1999, said the stunt depicted rock climbers as "environmentally irresponsible."

"Their actions make all climbers look bad," Tallman said.

Their anger over the video comes in part from preexisting resentment. Both Tallman and Miller claimed Lewis and the Moab Monkeys have left old slacklines, fixed ropes and bolts scattered throughout the backcountry.

"It's well known that some of those players who are in the Moab Monkeys leave their fixed ropes and fixed anchors all over the canyon lands, and it's really disgusting to me," Tallman said.

Trish Hedin, former president of the climbing access advocacy group Friends of Indian Creek, said that in one instance in 2015, Lewis' slackline anchors on Castleton Tower caused a climber to rappel off the wrong side of the tower, requiring a nighttime rescue.

"All of that is just high, high danger," Hedin said. When she confronted Lewis about the incident, she said, he refused to remove the bolts.

"He told me he was the representative for his sport. OK. In that capacity, you should be leading with a modicum of respect for other user groups, respect for land managers, and some level of intelligence," Hedin said. "It's none of the above."

Lewis has been blunt in replying to critics. In December, when the video first drew some negative feedback online, he told commenters, "Go (expletive) yourselves you self righteous (expletives)." After being contacted by the Sun News for this story, he posted again on Facebook: "to everyone who disliked this project [...] Go (expletive) yourselves (expletives)."

Taz said the insults and profanity didn't win over any opponents of the stunt.

"But that's what he is," she said. "That was a reaction that comes from his heart ... That doesn't devalue the project."

Lewis called his reaction "equal and opposite negativity" – an unfiltered response to the people who insulted something he saw as "a community effort to give love and spirit and respect to the community," and whose complaints to his shoe sponsor Five Ten led to the cancelation of his contract.



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"It's a constitutional right of mine that I can tell people how I feel about how they feel about what I did," Lewis said.

Regarding the 2015 Castleton Tower incident, Lewis said, "It is not my responsibility that people make bad decisions on their own. When you find brand-new bolts at the top of the summit, with no anchor material, and you can't rescue yourself once you've rappelled, that's not my fault."

As for the claims that he's left other gear hanging in the desert, Lewis said sometimes he leaves ropes in place for BASE jumping access, but that he works with the BLM and other land management agencies to help remove old and worn-out gear from the backcountry.

Rogers agreed: "We've definitely removed more stuff than anyone's left up," he said.

Bryant, at the BLM, confirmed Lewis speaks with the agency regularly and has helped with gear removal.

"I know the ethics around here," Lewis said. "I know what is good style and bad style."

That defense doesn't persuade Hedin.

"He knows nothing about ethical climbing," she said of Lewis. "He should read some old journals by Royal Robbins. That might help him understand ethical climbing."

"He's hurting his sport," she added. "I don't want, as a climber, to be lumped in with him."

"An age-old argument"

Rogers thinks the Facebook comments, and the involvement of Lewis, a relatively public figure in the small world of climbing, have drawn attention away from the substance of the disagreement.

"There's still an appropriate discussion happening in between the lines here," he said. "It's kind of like an age-old argument of what's good for the land and what's not good for the land."

Indeed, there is a substantive debate happening beneath the name-calling. Hedin, for instance, argued that the Cutler sandstone composing Ancient Art is far too fragile to support multiple people hanging off the summit, while Rogers said that the force of storms in the area far exceeds any stresses the Monkeys created. Miller claimed that the stunt promoted irresponsible land use,



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but Lewis and Taz contended that constant commercial guiding with inexperienced clients is a far more irresponsible use of the area than their project.

Neither the debate nor the accompanying anger are likely to end any time soon. Lewis certainly isn't backing down: "Andy Lewis doesn't give a (expletive) about anyone, what they think, or how they feel about me projecting in the desert," he said.

For Christmas 2017, he wants to go bigger and hang lights all over Castleton Tower, and he's inviting anyone – including his critics – to help.

"The lighting of the Christmas stoke will go on, hopefully, forever," he said. "I hope this will be a Moab tradition."

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5. **Citizens tell Kanab City Council NO on resolution to shrink the Monument**

Southern Utah News, March 23 | Jeff Frey

After tabling the issue for two weeks so he could consider revisions to his Resolution 3-1-17 R, a resolution declaring Kanab City's support for identifying the areas within the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM) that do not meet the criteria of the Antiquities Act of 1906, Mayor Robert Houston brought a slightly condensed version of his initial proposal to the Kanab City Council meeting on March 14.

At the February 28 meeting, a standing-room-only crowd, nearly all of whom supported the boundaries of the GSENM as it now exists, was invited to confer their opinions of the monument to the mayor directly. A few of them did that.

Over 30 citizens attended the March 14 meeting, although many thought that public comment on the issue would not be entertained. Those wishing to were allowed to voice an opinion and all were done courteously. Mayor Houston prefaced the comments by stating, "Both sides of this debate are dealing with fears that may, in reality, be non-issues."

Claudia Brescia felt the public is not being informed about these type of issues on a timely basis.

Richard Jenkinson remarked that there is really no market for coal now, and that is what is at the center of this push by Representative Noel's resolution already adapted by the state legislators. His wife Lynn stated tourism could be negatively-affected. "There are cultural and scientific reasons to include the Kaiparowits within the monument," she said.



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Pete Cooper said, "You have already decided what you want to do with this resolution. There has been no open discussion or forum on the issues presented in this resolution, and no democratic process involved in it."

Rina Cooper felt it set up a domino effect, "The lands designated in the monument were already federal lands belonging to all Americans. If they were ever controlled by the state, they would eventually be auctioned off to the highest private entity bidder and 'No Trespassing' signs could prevent the access to these lands we have today."

Latimer Smith said it was unfair to imply by this resolution, and those previous, that there was no public support for the GSENM. The feeling expressed by council member Michael East that the council must also represent the sentiment of the so-called 'silent majority,' who do not show up at these meetings, is confusing to many like Smith.

Rich Csenge was concerned about outsiders' perception of Kanab as the resolution becomes more well known. "Why make a public statement that could undermine our all important tourist industry," he questioned.

Doug McNair feared the decision on monument boundaries will lie with President Trump and will be unduly influenced by the extractive industries and taken in an atmosphere of greed.

Mindy McGuire, who has a ranching background, felt it was entirely appropriate to take a look at reducing the monument in the hope that it would reduce certain monument regulations she felt were adversely affecting ranchers.

Noel Poe quoted the renowned American poet Carl Sandberg, who wrote, "The roots of America have always been in the land. We take pride in our monumental landscapes. Wilderness is the American antiquity."

With that, the council members were asked for their comments on the resolution.

Byard Kershaw, a former BLM employee, stated that any land taken from the GSENM remains under the control of the BLM, albeit with less restrictions on the use of that land. He didn't feel that the resolution process was done in secret and there would be no change in the landscape itself. He felt the BLM would be its own worst enemy if they bucked the state takeover of these lands.

Michael East said he had read Presidential Proclamation 6920, that describes some of the reasons for including certain lands in the Monument for flora and fauna reasons, which were not a part of the criteria outlined in the American Antiquities Act (AA) of 1906. "I feel it was a Federal



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government land grab, and this resolution sends a message that if this type of thing ever happens again, it will be met with resistance,” stated East. “I want the AA to be followed as it was intended and consideration of plants and animals is not part of it.” [Note: The lands designated as the monument were already under federal control. State lands within the monument were traded for federal lands outside the monument.]

Jeff Yates recognized the positive impact the GSENM has on area tourism, but said 65 percent of the monument is inaccessible to tourists. “I am not in favor of Utah taking control of these Federal lands,” Yates said.

Brent Chamberlain remains upset over how the Monument was designated. “The president should not have the ability to designate a Monument before scientific study has been undertaken to justify a designation under the AA criteria,” he reiterated.

Joe B. Wright believes the Kanab area has benefited from the GSENM and believes in it, but had to ask himself if he would have voted for it 20 years ago. “Why are we so upset over these Federal lands?” he asked. When the sawmill shut down in Fredonia and Energy Fuels uranium mines closed, the bottom fell out of our economy. The Federal government owns 94 percent of Kane County. What are we getting out of it?”

Resolution 3-1-17 R was then stated as follows: The Kanab City Council urges the Utah State Legislature and the Utah federal legislative delegation to support a public input process and possible legislative action that will inventory and perhaps modify the GSENM boundaries to the appropriate area necessary to protect the antiquities and the objects identified in the Presidential Proclamation 6920, September 23, 1996, which are in accordance with the American Antiquities Act of 1906.

The resolution was unanimously passed by the council.

Mike Reynolds, Kanab City Land Use Coordinator, outlined a proposal that the city’s Planning and Zoning Commission has been working on the past three months regarding the density of short-term rental housing in Kanab’s neighborhoods. The proposal specifies that no more than 25 percent of homes on a city block, that are not owner occupied, can be utilized as a short term rental. Presently, homes in a planned development, governed by a Home Owners Association, are exempt from this proposed resolution, which will be debated in the next council meeting on March 28.

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6. **Utah: Mecca for ATV riders**

The Standard Examiner, March 23 | Lynn R. Blamires

Being a flatlander, born and raised in Oklahoma, you might wonder what qualifies me to be an ATV writer.

Well, as I was growing up, my family made annual trips to Utah to visit family. My dad was raised in Kaysville, joined the army out of high school, and was stationed at Camp Gruber in Oklahoma, where he met my mom.

Those annual trips assured me of two or three nights each year camping in the mountains. I went to Brigham Young University and met my wife, who was from Kaysville, and when I had the chance to settle in the mountains of Utah, I jumped at it.

Louis L'Amour said it best, "After you have spent time in the mountains, you will never be happy living with the prairie dogs again."

I started riding ATVs in 1992 and bought my first machine in '93. I had narrowed the choices down to two machines — the Honda Foreman 300 and the Suzuki King Quad 300. Being a bells-and-whistles kind of guy, I choose the Suzuki.

After my purchase, I fell into the same situation all people with their first ATV faces. Other than riding in circles around my house, I didn't know where to ride. It took a long time for the grass to grow back in that track.

The solution came on two fronts — I joined the Utah ATV Association, a Salt Lake riding club, and I attended my first ATV jamboree. Joining a club puts you in contact with people who know where to ride, and a jamboree gives experience with specific trail systems.

The first thing I learned is that the leader is the only one with a clean face. Now that is what I am talking about — this dirty brown face was going to learn the trails so he could lead the rides.

I love to write and ride. I submitted articles to Dirt Wheels magazine in 2003. It published three of them, which opened the opportunity to write for the Standard-Examiner. In the fall of 2004, I had a question about an article in the paper on the Shoshone ATV Trail system. In my discussion with staff, my writing experience came out and I was offered the opportunity to write about my ATV adventures. It has been quite a ride.



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Utah is a mecca to ATV riders all over the country. We have more jamborees than any other state to showcase our amazing trail systems. The Hatfield and McCoy trail system back East was modeled after the Paiute ATV Trail system in central Utah. Our state offers some 75,000 miles of OHV trail. I haven't ridden all of them, but I guess I will die trying.

The Paiute Trails are some of my favorite. Although the system offers plenty of camping opportunities, I prefer to ride into town, pull up to a motel, take a hot shower, eat a hot meal, and sleep in a comfortable bed. I don't have to pack a lot of equipment and extra gas because those amenities are available on the trail. I had my longest ride in a day on the Paiute. Six of us rode 273 miles in one day on that system.

Another favorite riding area is the San Rafael Swell. The swell is bursting with fascinating history, not only prehistoric, but ancient Indian and mining history as well.

I also enjoy the Arapeen trails between Manti and Ferron. It is a well-kept secret that there are 53 fishing holes mapped out with GPS coordinates on the Arapeen system. Some of these are accessible only by ATV.

I like the narrow ATV trails available in Utah, but I also enjoy the wider UTV trails I ride with my family. I have a 2013 Kawasaki Teryx4 LE, a 2013 Polaris XP Touring 850 (two-up), a 2012 Polaris XP 850 and 2014 Polaris Ace 325.

My email address is at the end of every article. I welcome emails and I answer all of them. I love to hear about your favorite trails. When you go, take plenty of water, keep the rubber side down, and let's keep in touch.

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7. Road to Understanding: Good relationship with federal land administrators is critical for Emery County success

KSL News, March 23 | Devon Dewey

CASTLE DALE, Emery County — Eight percent. That's all the private land for the entire 3 million acres of Emery County.

The federal government manages 80 percent and the state manages 12 percent.

Even where land is available, existing regulations limit its use and the ways in which it can be developed.



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These limits affect many aspects of life in Emery County, from expansion and employment to recreation and tourism. They also require a cooperation between the parties that manage it.

“The intent is to work together. We figure we have no choice. We need to work with them, not against them,” said Ray Petersen, Emery County public lands director. “We need to work with the agencies, resolve the problems that come up with the stakeholders, whether it’s livestock grazing, mining issues, recreation, hunting and fishing, stuff like that.”

Petersen doesn’t mind the imbalance in land ownership so long as the county can make use of the natural resources on federal land.

“We always say if we can just keep Washington and Salt Lake City out of our hair, we can get along with the local agencies and work things out on a local level here,” he said.

Economic impact

Back in 2016, the Obama administration placed a moratorium on coal leases on federal land. That decision directly impacted jobs for many people in Emery and Carbon counties who rely on mining for work. According to Carbon County Commissioner Jae Potter, eight in 10 jobs in the county come from mining and power plants.

Utah's energy economy, which is largely derived from oil, natural gas and coal, generates \$653 million in state and local revenues, according to energy.utah.gov. And the Utah Governor's Office of Energy Development reports that renewable energy is on the rise.

This may not bode well for the county, which used to have at least eight active coal mines, and is now down to two.

“It’s always had cycles. It’s always had its ups and downs, but this is one of the deepest, longest we’ve had in awhile,” said Joe Brinton, a geologist for Castle Valley Mining. “So, we’re concerned.”

Coal, gypsum, uranium, oil, coal bed methane and natural gas are some of the biggest natural resources that the county extracts. Most of those resources are located on public lands.

“A few years ago, our mine itself was ranked number 11 in terms of overall production, and now we’re ranked number 3,” Brinton said. “And it’s not that we got any bigger. The other mining companies have gone away, basically.”



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The decrease in the demand for coal worries many in the mining business, as they depend on coal for work. County officials depend on it as an economic boost.

“We wonder if it will ever turn around,” Brinton said.

It is unclear how long the county will continue burning coal for power plants, but Keith Brady, a county commissioner in Emery, hopes to continue mining it for other purposes.

“We do hope that we can reopen some mines here and either sell it internationally or use coal as a raw material for a byproduct,” Brady said.

Public lands

Emery County has beautiful red rock canyons that are a popular attraction for rock climbing and bouldering. In the middle of the county, the San Rafael Swell encompasses 2,000 square miles of deep canyons and wide-open land, much of which is in pristine condition. There are also a number of Native American drawings on portions of the cliff face within the Swell. The county is also home to the popular Goblin Valley State Park with its unique hoodoos and landscape.

The county can still use the land that is owned publicly, but there are regulations on how that land can be used. If the county wanted to build bike trails, camping areas, oil wells or mines, they would need to jump through a few hoops to obtain permission from the Bureau of Land Management. And even then, it may not be granted.

Petersen says the county has enough private land that if officials want to bring in another factory or power plant, they could. The county currently has two coal-burning power plants: the Hunter and the Huntington. Its access to the natural resources on public lands that can cause problems for the county. He says the county’s relationship with federal regulators is going well right now but he fears what changes could come in the future.

For instance, President Donald Trump or a future president could designate certain areas of land as a monument, as former President Barack Obama did for the Bears Ears National Monument. Or Congress could designate large areas of land as wilderness, which would prohibit any kind of mining operations. Or, federal agencies could place certain species on the endangered species list, restricting operations in that species’ habitat.

For now, the coal industry in the county seems to be heading for a recovery period, with changes under the current administration that may bode well for the immediate future of the county. Newly-confirmed Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has approved a \$22 million coal lease in Sevier and Sanpete counties just last week. The move unlocks 56 million tons of recoverable coal.



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Nathaniel Shoaff, an attorney with the Sierra Club, a national environmental organization, blasted the decision.

"Despite low demand in the U.S. and international markets for the coal Utah is already mining, Zinke has now placed over 6,000 acres of public land in jeopardy," he said.

But Petersen's goal isn't simply to drill and mine everywhere in the county, he said. For years, county officials have studied and worked on a plan to best manage the land, including protecting large areas of land. Petersen believes there is a way to both use the land for its natural resources and still maintain and protect the land and various animal habitats.

County officials are working with the state and the Bureau of Land Management to expand the boundaries of Goblin Valley State Park to help manage an increase in visitation to the park and surrounding slot canyons and to help maintain a lot of the land to preserve it for future generations. That can only be accomplished through a functional partnership between the local, state and federal governments, Peterson said.

"That's what the challenge is. The best management for the land benefits everybody."

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8. What its like to be a woman in wildland firefighting, adventurous recruits needed

St George News, March 24 | Julie Applegate

ST. GEORGE – Are you an adventurous woman looking for a new career? Then you might want to consider this opportunity: Dixie National Forest is recruiting women to fight wildfires, a calling one woman describes as having made her stronger mentally and physically, more confident and comfortable in all sorts of environments – and it even helped her get through college.

The "Women in Wildland Fire" program is a collaborative effort by the Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-La Sal, and Uinta-Wasatch-Cache national forests to recruit and train more women.

"Opportunities abound in natural resource management, particularly in wildland fire, whether as a career or summer job while getting through school," Megan Salyors said. Salyors is a Forest Service fire prevention technician and former member of a Hotshot crew.

"My personal experiences in the field have influenced me in ways that extend beyond fighting fires."



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Salyors is leading the effort to get more women into wildland firefighting and feels that women can benefit greatly from the experience.

"I am stronger both mentally and physically. I am comfortable in ever-changing environments. I communicate better," she said. "My confidence has grown and my leadership capabilities have excelled."

"I feel others could benefit the same way even if they don't choose to pursue wildland fire management as a career as I have. The skills that could be obtained by working in fire for a few summers can easily help prepare individuals for other fields."

The initiative is an effort to increase diversity, not just for diversity's sake, Salyors said, but to take advantage of different backgrounds and different ways of thinking to make the organizations better.

"We do feel that fire and aviation management could benefit from having some different perspectives within the workforce," she said.

Salyors grew up near Las Vegas and had no idea what the job of wildland firefighting was like – or that she would love it. She started her wildfire career in the Lake Mead National Recreation Area in the summer of 2002.

"It was one of the more extreme seasons that we have on record," she said.

That year, fires burned in Colorado urban areas, an Oregon blaze burned half a million acres and the Rodeo-Chediski Fire in Arizona raged out of control, ultimately consuming 481 structures and more than 468,000 acres.

"It was just a really huge, really active fire season," she said. "It was a huge eye-opener of possibilities of what I could do."

Fighting wildfires is physically tough, she said, but the long hours, difficult terrain and intense camaraderie are immensely rewarding.

"You question whether you can do it, and when you do do it, you're ... proud of your achievement," she said.

The job also worked really well with her college schedule and she made enough money to not have to work as much during the school year.



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After college, Salyors decided to pursue firefighting as a career. She progressed to jumping then rappelling out of a helicopter while on a Hotshot crew.

The Forest Service is recruiting women for emergency firefighting crew positions; the crews are called out if all the regular firefighters are busy.

"Then, if our fire season dictates we need more help, we can bring them in to supplement our numbers," Salyors said.

Starting on an emergency crew is a great way to explore the possibilities of wildland firefighting.

"They're able to put a toe in the water. They get the training and get the actual hands-on experience," Salyors said. "They can see that they're tough enough, that they can handle it, that it's not necessarily a machismo kind of environment.

"That's some of the feedback that we get, some of the participants that have come through have said 'You know, I learned I was a hard worker, I did things I didn't think I could do.

"They realize that what they thought were their boundaries really aren't."

Roughly 10 percent of permanent wildfire positions are currently filled by women; for seasonal firefighters, the number is somewhat higher, Salyors said.

"Many people are unaware that women are wildland firefighters simply due to the low numbers of women in wildland fire management," Dixie National Forest spokesman Bode Mecham said in a statement.

"However, the number of women coming into the wildland firefighting organization is growing. These women not only fight fire on the Dixie National Forest but all around the nation."

Details

The Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-La Sal, and Uinta-Wasatch-Cache national forests are looking for motivated hardworking individuals to train and become part of the Women in Wildland Fire program as on-call wildland firefighters.

Applications are available and accepted online until March 31 [here](#).

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9. Volunteers plan cleanup trip on lower section of San Juan River

The Times-Independent, March 24 | Rose Egelhoff

Tim Hunter describes the San Juan as “kind of a trashy river.” To address that problem, Hunter, a former river guide from Colorado, started leading cleanup trips on the San Juan more than 20 years ago. Now, he takes groups of 12 to 14 volunteers on a 10-day trip every spring before the boating season starts and every fall at the end of the season. The next trip will launch April 2.

Participants are all volunteers and share costs, providing their own food and gear. They put in at Sand Island, near Bluff, and float 84 miles to the Clay Hills Crossing in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

The BLM provides a permit, trash bags and a dumpster midway through the trip in Mexican hat. At the end of the trip, Glen Canyon NRA provides a dump truck to pick up the trash.

“The Monticello Field Office really appreciates the volunteer service and stewardship that the San Juan River cleanup group provide twice a year,” said Monticello Field Manager Don Hoffheins. Last fall, he said, the group removed 14 cubic yards of trash and 40 tires from the river in nine days.

“We are working with them to support their spring cleanup trip,” he said.

The trash comes from a variety of sources, according to Hunter.

“[The river] comes down through a lot of different metropolitan areas, through Shiprock to Farmington, through the Rez, along the highway corridor in a few places,” Hunter said. “It’s just an ugly thing. It’s not like it’s river runners leaving trash. It’s trash that has accumulated from people in general along the river corridor ... It’s just a huge variety of stuff that we pull out. Anything that can float or roll comes down the river.”

Participants walk stretches of the shoreline, picking up trash to bring back to their rafts. They focus on the outer bends of the river, where debris piles up.

“Last fall we did a pretty thorough job on the upper section and there will be stuff there but we need to focus down on the lower section,” Hunter said. “It will be shorter than normal just because I think we can blast through a couple sections pretty quick.”

Trip participant Joan Rohwer and her husband, Jerry, have been participating in the river cleanups since the mid-90s, Rohwer told The Times-Independent.



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"We were beginning to raft at that time," she said. "We'd done a few trips and we'd really enjoyed it. We wanted to do something to give back to the river."

The San Juan River runs through the Rohwers' community in Pagosa Springs, Colorado, then down into New Mexico and into Utah. Along the way, the San Juan collects runoff from arroyos and side tributaries, said Rohwer, including the La Plata and the Animas rivers.

"It picks up a lot of debris, not just trees and natural debris, but water bottles, tennis shoes, balls that sort of thing," she said.

The Rohwers have also found some strange items over the years.

"Every once in awhile we'll find something that makes us feel a little funny like a big 50 gallon barrel and we don't know what's inside of it," she said. "This most recent trip we found a small chest freezer. I think that probably came from that flood in Shiprock area sometime last year."

One time they found a tank filled with oil. Another time, it was a truck that had been pushed off the rim near Mexican Hat.

Rohwer said there seems to be less trash than in previous years, although the volunteers now find more plastic water bottles than they used to.

"I think the communities upstream are being a little more careful about what can get into the arroyos and side canyons," Rohwer said.

"[The trip is] a lot of fun and it's a lot of work but it's a whole different view of the river. You are walking the banks instead of just floating from campsite to campsite. You really become familiar with the river ecosystem ... We see a lot of wildlife," she added.

The trip also assesses campsites for invasive species and sometimes removes them. They have collected seed heads from reynoutria grass to keep the weedy grass from spreading. On some trips, they also do trail work along the river.

The goal, Hunter said, is "to keep the river corridor clean."

"There's no real wilderness left in the world but [we want] to give people a little sense of that untouched, unblemished experience as much as possible," Hunter said.

Space on the trip is limited and fills up fast, Hunter said. However, he invites anyone interested

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10. Visit a sage grouse lek on April 8

Military-Technologies, March 24 | Military News

PRICE — One of the iconic native species of the West is the greater sage grouse. Every spring, these birds gather at sites adjacent to nesting grounds called leks, where the males put on elaborate displays of courtship characterized by strutting and unique vocalizations.

You can witness this ritual yourself at a free wildlife viewing event near Price on April 8. The event will be held at Emma Park, about 13 miles north of Price.

Because sage grouse are sensitive to human disturbances, the event will be limited to 15 vehicles, and pre-registration is required. Viewing the birds is best before and right after sunrise, so attendees will need to be at the site early. Sage grouse usually leave their strutting ground within an hour after sun-up.

Division of Wildlife Resources biologists will be there to help you find the birds and answer questions about sage grouse biology and management.

“Watching sage grouse perform their impressive rituals, on traditional strutting grounds, is an extraordinary experience,” says Morgan Jacobsen, regional conservation outreach manager for the DWR. “This is a chance to escape the busyness of life and watch a quiet, yet remarkable, natural event in Utah.”

Photographers will likely be challenged by their distance from the leks, as well as obstructions posed by brush and rolling terrain. Binoculars and spotting scopes will be available for attendees who don’t have their own.

Before making the trip, please be aware that other limiting factors may cause the grouse to leave the viewing site early or to not visit the site at all. Eagles, coyotes and other predators can scare them away. Wind, rain or snow can also cause them to seek cover and stay out of sight.

“As with any wildlife viewing event, there’s no guarantee the elements will be perfect,” Jacobsen says. “Part of the joy that comes from witnessing these birds in such a special setting is knowing it doesn’t happen every day.”

For more information or to register for the event, contact Jacobsen at 435-613-3707 or This email address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it..

Directions



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- To get to Emma Park from the Wasatch Front, travel east on U.S. Highway 6 from Spanish Fork. At the top of Price Canyon, look for the Emma Park turnoff near mile marker 221, and turn left onto the Emma Park Road. Travel east until you see vehicles with the DWR logo on their doors.
- To get to Emma Park from Price, travel north on U.S. Highway 6 to the Castle Gate power plant. Turn right onto U.S. Highway 191, and travel northeast about six miles to a fork in the road. Turn left onto the Emma Park Road, and travel west until you see the state vehicles.

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E&E/NATIONAL NEWS – FULL STORY

1. **In a first for the government, dogs will be welcome at the Interior Department**

The Washington Post, March 23 | Lisa Rein and Karin Brulliard

The Cabinet secretary who rode a horse to work on his first day is letting his employees bring their dogs to the office.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke will announce in an email to employees Thursday morning the start of “Doggy Days at Interior,” a program that will launch with test runs at the agency’s Washington headquarters on two Fridays in May and September.

The new policy will make Interior the first federal agency to go dog-friendly — and cement Zinke’s status as the Trump administration’s most visible animal fan. Zinke earlier this month arrived at his new workplace astride Tonto, a bay roan gelding who belongs to the U.S. Park Police and resides in stables on the Mall.

President Trump, meanwhile, remains pet-less, a status that makes him the first U.S. leader in 150 years without a companion animal and leaves the White House without a first dog or cat. Vice President Pence and his family keep two cats and a rabbit at their Naval Observatory home, though those critters keep a relatively low profile.

Zinke, a fifth-generation Montanan, retired Navy SEAL and former congressman, said his dog policy’s primary goal is to boost morale at the far-flung Interior agency, which includes the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management and six other departments. Interior ranked 11th in employee morale of the 18 largest federal agencies



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in last year's Best Places to Work in the Federal Government survey, with just 61 percent of its 70,000 employees saying they're happy in their jobs.

"I'm taking action to establish a pilot program for Doggy Days at Interior!" Zinke will say in his 9 a.m. missive to Washington-area employees, which shows two photographs of him with his wife, Lolita, and their 18-month-old black and white Havanese dog, Ragnar.

"Opening the door each evening and seeing him running at me is one of the highlights of my day," Zinke's email says. "I can't even count how many miles I've driven across Montana with Ragnar riding shotgun, or how many hikes and river floats Lola and I went on with the little guy. But I can tell you it was always better to have him."

The new policy, which has never been tried in the risk-averse federal government, puts the Trump administration in the vanguard of public institutions with dog-friendly policies. Members of Congress have been bringing their dogs to the U.S. Capitol since the 19th century, but few other taxpayer-funded workplaces have gone to the dogs.

Private companies, on the other hand, are increasingly touting their dog-friendliness as an employee perk. Among the most prominent are Kimpton hotels, the biotech firm Genentech and Google, which says in its code of conduct that "affection for our canine friends is an integral facet of our corporate culture."

In a survey conducted last year by Banfield Pet Hospital, the nation's largest chain of veterinary clinics the vast majority of U.S. employees and human resources managers at pet-friendly companies said the policies improved morale, lowered stress and decreased guilt about leaving pets at home.

Zinke, an avid hunter and fisherman, promised on his first day as secretary earlier this month to bring a dog-friendly office policy to Interior. The pledge, along with his promise to preserve public lands, drew loud applause as he addressed employees in the headquarters cafeteria.

"It's a very exciting initiative that's close to his heart," said Heather Swift, a Zinke spokeswoman. "Every day he visits a different hallway in the building to introduce himself and somebody asks him when we're going to have puppy days."

But there are obvious concerns about having dogs at the office, which is why the policy is launching slowly as a pilot, officials said. Zinke's staff has been consulting with agency attorneys in recent weeks to work out parameters for the dogs, including whether they'll need to



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be leashed or be limited to a certain size. It's likely they'll be to be fully housebroken, vaccinated and have no history of aggression.

Other possible complications when Fido reports to Interior: Fleas, bites, people with allergies, and pets who may, in a new environment, relieve themselves indoors.

"I understand some of you may have concerns about this policy," Zinke's email says. Employees who "would rather not interact with dogs at the workplace" will be allowed to telework when dogs are around or have "other flexibilities."

Ragnar was a frequent visitor to Zinke's Capitol Hill office and rode on his campaign bus when Zinke was running for Congress. Ragnar is also the secretary's fishing companion, though he does not join him on hunting trips.

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2. **FBI posed as documentary filmmakers to conduct interviews with Bundy Ranch supporters**

The Washington Times, March 24 | Andrew Blake

Undercover FBI agents disguised as documentary filmmakers were deployed to the Nevada desert in 2014 to speak with supporters of rancher Cliven Bundy amid an armed standoff with the federal government, an agent testified this week.

Testifying on behalf of the government in its case against two of those supporters, FBI Special Agent Charles Johnson told jurors Wednesday how the bureau used a bogus film crew to gather statements during the standoff, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

Footage from the purported film, "America Reloaded," was played in court as jurors prepared to decide the fate of Scott Drexler and Eric Parker — two of six defendants accused of conspiring to keep the U.S. Bureau of Land Management from impounding Mr. Bundy's cattle during the widely reported 2014 row between federal BLM agents and the rancher and his supporters.

Mr. Drexler told the supposed filmmakers that he had traveled from Idaho to the Bunkerville ranch upon reading about protests being waged against the BLM after its agents tried to seize cattle from Mr. Bundy following a lengthy legal dispute.

"What I was looking for was just a show of support ... it seems as if when there are armed people around a situation, then the authorities have to be a little more civil, have to treat you like



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a person,” he said on camera. “If nobody is facing any kind of consequences for their actions, they can just do whatever they want.”

The objective of individuals who assembled on Mr. Bundy’s behalf “was just a show of force,” Mr. Drexler told the interviewers, the newspaper reported.

Mr. Parker, meanwhile, said his own involvement stemmed from his desire “to stand for the Constitution.”

“I don’t think you have to be in the militia for that,” Mr. Parker said on the video. “The goal was peaceful end.”

Nonetheless, jurors were showed footage in which Mr. Parker demonstrated precisely how he planned to use his rifle to get a clear vantage point in the event the standoff turned violent.

“If they started shooting at people in the crowd, I would have been able to lay down cover fire,” Mr. Parker said on tape.

Prosecutors have charged six men in all with charges stemming from the standoff, including conspiracy, firearm offenses and assault on a federal officer, including Mr. Bundy and two of his sons, Ryan and Ammon.

Dan Hill, Ammon Bundy’s defense attorney, previously took aim over the FBI’s use of a bogus film crew when details about the practice emerged in earlier court filings, and said then that it was “troublesome that the FBI would sink to that tactic.”

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3. **WILDFIRES: In Colo., fire season is now a yearlong problem**

E & E News, March 24 | Scott Streater

When the grass fire was first spotted in a vacant field early Sunday morning in Boulder County, Colo., it didn't come as much of a surprise to state and local fire officials, who quickly mobilized hundreds of firefighters to battle the blaze.

The Sunshine Fire, while never burning more than 74 acres, was less than a quarter-mile from a residential neighborhood, and only a mile from downtown Boulder. Four hundred twenty-six homes were evacuated, and 836 more were placed on "pre-evacuation status," meaning the residents there needed to be prepared to leave at a moment's notice.



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"It could have gotten real ugly, real fast," said Caley Fisher, a spokeswoman with the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control.

The grass fire was contained within two days, no structures were damaged and no one was hurt. But the Sunshine Fire highlights a dangerous new trend in the Centennial State: Wildfire season, which not long ago used to start in May, is now a year-round problem.

Wildfires large enough to force hundreds of evacuations like in Boulder County historically are not supposed to happen in Colorado in March — the month the state receives the most snowfall on average each year.

But warmer and drier conditions have made this a new reality for the state. It has been forced to retain more firefighter crews during winter months and now must keep air tankers, helicopters and other heavy firefighting equipment on standby year-round.

"If you look at our fire season, it used to be summer and now it's February. So that has definitely changed," Kevin Klein, director of the Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, said earlier this month at a training session of former Vice President Al Gore's Climate Reality Leadership Corps in Denver.

"Definitely on the time and intensity, we've seen more fires," Klein added. "It's safe for me to say that our fire season is longer and our fires are more intense. That's just something we can't deny."

It's been an unusually dry March in Colorado so far, with snowfall levels in much of the southern half of the state well below normal.

In Colorado Springs, the largest metropolitan area south of the Palmer Divide and the site of the two most destructive wildfires in the state's history — the Waldo Canyon (2012) and Black Forest (2013) fires — the area receives an average of 8 inches of snow in March, said Bill Line, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Pueblo, Colo.

Total recorded snowfall in the area in the first three weeks of March: zero.

That is true across much of southern and eastern Colorado, and has made low-elevation areas in places like Boulder County, where open grasslands should be covered with snow this time of year, especially vulnerable to wildfires.



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Fighting the fires is expensive. This week's Sunshine Fire cost at least \$725,000, according to the Boulder County Sheriff's Office, requiring the mobilization of 50 fire trucks, seven aircraft and about 250 firefighters from Boulder and surrounding areas.

"For the last month, we've been experiencing those kinds of fires essentially because we haven't had enough snow or other precipitation to stop that trend," said Vaughn Jones, the state Division of Fire Prevention and Control's wildland section chief. "When it's warm and windy and dry like it has been, if you get ignition, you will see more grass fires under those conditions."

New normal?

Top state officials, including Gov. John Hickenlooper (D), are expected to meet with representatives of the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service to discuss the wildfire outlook for the year. The Division of Fire Prevention and Control will then release a wildfire outlook report next month, Fisher said.

"The initial reports I've seen so far are calling for an average to slightly above-average season," Jones said.

More than 3.8 million Colorado residents along the Front Range and the eastern half of the state live in areas classified as experiencing some level of drought — about 41 percent of the state, according to the Lincoln, Neb.-based National Drought Mitigation Center.

Less than 1 percent of the state was classified as being in some form of drought condition this time last year, according to center data.

Meanwhile, much of the state has seen record warm temperatures this month.

In Colorado Springs, temperatures over the past weekend reached the 80s, breaking single-day records; normal high temperatures this time of year are in the low 50s, according to the National Weather Service.

Coupled with low humidity and blustery winds gusting as high as 50 mph on some days, many parts of southern Colorado are already a potential tinderbox in the first days of spring.

It doesn't help that the state recently experienced the largest bark beetle outbreaks in its recorded history, leaving hundreds of thousands of dead trees that can help fuel wildfires.



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Indeed, on the same day the Sunshine Fire erupted, Forest Service crews were working to contain a 300-acre fire in the Pike and San Isabel National Forests and the Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands. That fire continues to burn.

Most climate projections indicate that droughts and wildfires will increase in frequency and severity in Colorado by 2050, mainly as a consequence of continued warming, according to the Colorado State Forest Service at Colorado State University.

Colorado could warm on average by as much as 6.5 degrees Fahrenheit by 2050, according to computer models developed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NASA and the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

That likely means more blazes in a state that has experienced the 10 largest wildfires in its history since 2002, according to the State Forest Service.

"Wildfires do occur in the state of Colorado year-round, every month of the year," Jones said. "There's a lot of variables, obviously, with the weather and things like that, but it is a year-round occurrence."

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4. **MINING: Labor Dept. moves to delay Obama-era safety rule**

E & E News, March 24 | Dylan Brown

The Labor Department's Mine Safety and Health Administration announced today it wanted to delay new examination requirements at non-coal mines.

A notice to be published in Monday's edition of the Federal Register seeks to push back new mandates from May 23 to July 24. Several other agencies have similarly moved to push back rules.

MSHA said it was "proposing to delay the effective date to assure that mine operators and miners affected by the final rule have the training and compliance assistance they need."

Whereas mine operators can currently conduct examinations at any time during a shift, the new rule would require that an inspection occur before miners are exposed to any risk and workers be notified of any hazard found (Greenwire, Jan. 18).



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The standards also mandate that companies keep a record of the examination, risks discovered and the date of corrective action, to be provided to MSHA or the miners' union upon request.

The rule was finalized in the last days of the Obama administration and published in the Federal Register on Jan. 23.

Labor Department leaders said the pause would be consistent with President Trump's executive order mandating a regulatory freeze and reviews of new standards.

The examination rule stems from the previous administration's concern about incidents at non-coal mines. MSHA will accept comment for 30 days starting Monday on how long it should delay it.

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5. **NATURAL RESOURCES: Interior to repeal Obama fossil fuel royalty rule**

E & E News, March 24 | Dylan Brown

The Interior Department is working on repealing Obama-era changes to how coal, oil and natural gas are valued to calculate federal royalties.

The agency unveiled its plans in a legal filing yesterday in which Justice Department attorneys requested a three-month delay in an industry lawsuit against the Obama fossil fuel royalty formula.

The Trump administration had already put the rule on hold until the litigation was resolved.

The motion yesterday says the Office of Natural Resources Revenue (ONRR) plans to propose a new rulemaking that would repeal the valuation rule. The notice of proposed rulemaking would be published by June 22, within the 90-day time frame.

The motion was unopposed by coal company Cloud Peak Energy Inc. or any other plaintiffs, and approved by Wyoming U.S. District Court Judge Nancy Freudenthal.

ONRR has "concluded that several provisions of the 2017 Rule do not meet its policy and implementation objectives of offering greater simplicity, certainty, clarity, and consistency in mineral valuation and reporting," the motion states.



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Under the Obama rule that has yet to go into effect, companies would have to pay royalties based on the value of their commodity at the first "arm's length" transaction, among other changes.

The Obama administration update closed what critics called a loophole allowing companies, mainly coal companies, to sell to their subsidiaries at deflated prices.

Extraction companies and their trade associations sued to block the new framework they decried as unnecessary, "complex, difficult to implement, and far less reliable."

Both chambers of Congress have proposed Congressional Review Act resolutions to strike down the rule, as well (Greenwire, March 3).

Advocacy group the Powder River Basin Resource Council recently joined the case in defense of the rule (Energywire, March 21).

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6. **REGULATIONS: Enviro law group releases blueprint for life under Trump**

E & E News, March 24 | Arianna Skibell

The Environmental Law Institute has released a guide for navigating the Trump administration and Congress' deregulatory push.

The [document](#), titled "Regulatory Reform in the Trump Era," details legal processes policymakers can use to roll back environmental regulations, how they work and their likely effects.

"We are entering an era when fundamental changes are being proposed to the basic system that has prevailed since our country set out nearly 50 years ago to reverse the environmental degradation of the industrial age," ELI President Scott Fulton said in a statement.

"Though we believe that reform and modernization can play constructive roles in optimizing government performance in the environmental arena, change needs to be carefully considered, and just as carefully managed. We need to avoid eroding the hard-fought gains in environmental quality that our current system of protection has produced."

Fulton said ELI has been fielding questions about the deregulatory agenda and what opportunities there are for people and groups to engage. The new guide is an attempt to answer those questions.



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The document is divided into "fact sheets" that address the various mechanisms available to change environmental protects, from the Congressional Review Act to executive orders and legislation.

The first fact sheet deals with the president's ability to reserve or revise executive orders. Orders vulnerable to repeal, the report said, deal with oceans, coasts and the Great Lakes, and with climate change.

The president could work with Congress to undo public land and resource protections under the Antiquities Act, the report says. While no president has ever attempted to repeal a national monument designation, the law does not expressly prohibit it.

Another area to watch, the ELI report states, is the fast-tracking of projects that require federal approval. Trump has already wielded this tool by advancing the Keystone XL pipeline. Congress could also add or remove environmental review and permitting requirements for projects.

When it comes to the Paris climate deal, ELI says withdrawal can be complicated. Trump could issue an executive order stating his intent to back out, but cannot send a formal notice until Nov. 4, 2019, and it could not take effect until the following year, days after the presidential election.

Concerning regulations, the report notes that the administration will likely move to undo the Clean Water Rule and the Clean Power Plan through traditional rulemaking channels. But ELI said the courts could have the final say.

The report also explains the Congressional Review Act and Trump's executive order requiring agencies to offset the cost of new rules with old ones.

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7. **PUBLIC LANDS: Senator says BLM should move West**

E & E News, March 24 | Dennis Webb, Grand Junction [Colo.] Daily Sentinel

If U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner has his way, top-level decisions by a major federal public lands agency would no longer be made in Washington, D.C.

Rather, they'd emanate from right here in Grand Junction, which also could see hundreds of new jobs should the Colorado Republican manage to persuade Congress to move the Bureau of Land Management's national headquarters to town.



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"I think it makes perfect sense to have the BLM headquartered in Grand Junction, Colorado, which is nearby other BLM-centric states, whether that's Utah, Wyoming, states to the south and farther west," Gardner said in an interview with The Daily Sentinel, expanding on an idea he has brought up publicly several times in recent weeks.

The thrust of Gardner's pitch is that the more than 99 percent of the nearly 250 million acres of land the BLM manages is west of the Mississippi River.

"That is a heck of a long ways away from Washington, D.C., a heck of a long ways away from the policymakers who are impacting the lives of Westerners daily. And that's why I think we should move the headquarters of BLM to the West, where BLM land isn't a thousand miles away but it's in the backyard."

Gardner has broached the idea at a Colorado Water Congress meeting in Denver, at the Senate nomination hearing for since-confirmed Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, and on the Senate floor before a Senate majority, including Gardner, voted to repeal new BLM planning rules.

The idea of moving the headquarters to Colorado won support from Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, according to video of comments he made during a panel discussion organized by the Colorado Petroleum Council and American Petroleum Institute. The website <http://www.westernwire.net>, a news and commentary endeavor of the Western Energy Alliance oil and gas association, posted the video clip in which Hickenlooper talks about the idea of bringing the headquarters here in the state.

"We should go get 'em," Hickenlooper said to some laughter and applause.

He said one benefit would be more trust between the agency, regulated industries and local communities if everyone knows who is doing the regulating and what their regulatory process is.

Westernwire.net reported that Denver Mayor Michael Hancock also voiced support for the idea.

Presumably Hancock would like to have Denver considered as a home to the agency. But Gardner was clear in his interview with the Sentinel that his comments about Grand Junction as a location for the headquarters aren't an offhand example of a possible Colorado location. Grand Junction is where he thinks the national offices belong.

"I would love to see it in Grand Junction," he said, citing the city's accessibility via its airport and Interstate 70, and location in what he said is the heart of BLM country.



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He recognized that others supportive of a BLM move might want to see the national office moved to some other Western state, including Montana, Zinke's home state.

"But bottom line is I think we in the West can agree, whether it's Grand Junction or anywhere in the West, we can have better policy as a result" of moving the office, he said.

Gardner said he thinks moving the headquarters would require legislation, and he hasn't introduced a bill yet. He said he's talked to a number of colleagues on the Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee and everyone agrees that the less power a bureaucrat in Washington has over BLM land, and the closer decision-making is to that land, the better.

"Washington, D.C., is a company town and it would be nice to break it up a little bit," he said.

He's spoken privately to Zinke about the idea of moving the headquarters and brought it up during Zinke's confirmation hearing. The BLM is part of the Interior Department.

During the confirmation hearing, Gardner asked Zinke about the idea of putting portions of the federal workforce closer to the lands they manage. Zinke said he thinks agency workers should be close to those lands, and there are different approaches for doing that.

"I think the bottom line is the decisions oftentimes are better at the front line if you empower your people to do them," Zinke said.

Drawing on his military background, he cited the military philosophy of centralizing direction and decentralizing execution. Pressed by Gardner about whether Zinke would work with him to move headquarters of agencies like the BLM to the West, Zinke said, "I'm committed to look at our organization across the board, what we're going to look like as a department 100 years from now."

A western move of the headquarters could bring hundreds of jobs with it. BLM spokesperson Kimberly Brubeck said 388 employees are based in Washington. Fifty of those, however, aren't directly involved in national-level work, but are posted to the BLM's Eastern States Office, which manages BLM lands and resources east of the Mississippi.

The BLM has more than 9,600 employees nationwide.

Gardner said some employees, such as certain members of the legal team, would need to remain in the capital if the headquarters were moved, but most positions could be moved if the offices were relocated.



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"I think the result of it would be thousands of jobs" in Grand Junction, said Mesa County Commissioner Scott McInnis.

The former congressman said that's because of lobbying, staff-support and other positions that would result. In addition, temporary jobs would be created to build the office space, he said.

He said Grand Junction would be perfect for the headquarters.

"We've got an airport that would handle it," he said.

He called Grand Junction "right in the center of where it should be." But he said other states would likely say there should be some kind of bidding process for such a facility. And he warned from personal experience about the difficulties of trying to make such a relocation happen.

He said that back in the 1980s, when he was new member of the state House of Representatives, there was an effort to get what was then the Colorado Division of Wildlife's headquarters relocated to Grand Junction.

"And man, we ran into a bureaucratic wall you couldn't even blast your way through," he said.

One obstacle was the desire of other communities to be home to the new headquarters, he said.

Today, the main office for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, which includes the former Division of Wildlife, remains in Denver.

McInnis predicted that the complications would be far greater for any effort to get the BLM offices moved from the nation's capital. But he said the county would help Gardner all it could with trying to bring the offices to town.

Mark Squillace, director of the Natural Resources Law Center at the University of Colorado School of Law and a former Interior Department staffer who was an adviser to then-Secretary Bruce Babbitt, said he's not a fan of a western move of the BLM headquarters.

"I think it would really diminish the importance within the Department of Interior of the BLM," Squillace said.

He also believes it would further politicize what's already a politicized agency.

Gardner's idea springs from some of the same concerns he had about the new BLM planning rule. The House as well as the Senate have voted to revoke it and President Trump is expected to



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sign off on rescinding it. While the BLM had said the rule was designed to increase public input in the planning process, Gardner said someone living in a place like New York City shouldn't have more say about what happens on BLM lands in western Colorado than county commissioners living among those lands.

He said that when it comes to public land management, the voices of commissioners, land users and recreationists need to be heard.

"I think this (headquarters move) would give those nearest the land the best opportunity for that voice to be heard," he said.

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8. **KEYSTONE XL: Trump approves 'incredible' pipeline as greens prep lawsuit**

E & E News, March 24 | Hannah Northey

President Trump announced federal approval for the Keystone XL oil pipeline this morning and signaled he will push Nebraska to grant the last permit TransCanada Corp. needs to finish the deeply controversial project to connect Canadian oil sands crude with Gulf Coast refineries.

Calling KXL an "incredible pipeline," Trump signed a presidential permit for the pipeline to cross the U.S. border with Canada. At his side were TransCanada CEO Russell Girling, Energy Secretary Rick Perry and the heads of labor unions.

Groups including the American Petroleum Institute and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and pro-project lawmakers including Sens. Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) praised the move.

Trump said he would call Nebraska's Republican governor, Pete Ricketts, an ardent supporter of the president, to press him on the issue.

"Keystone, finished. They're going to start construction when?" Trump asked, turning to Girling, who quickly noted that the project still needs the Nebraska permit.

"I'm sure Nebraska will be good, Pete is a fantastic governor," Trump said. "I'll call him today."

However, it's the Nebraska Public Service Commission that is reviewing TransCanada's application. And environmentalists have vowed a long and bitter legal and public fight.



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During a conference call with reporters, pipeline critics poked fun at the president for assuming that one phone call to Ricketts would greenlight the pipeline.

"He's so arrogant to think a phone call to Governor Ricketts would somehow grant and greenlight this project in our state," said Jane Kleeb, head of Bold Alliance, one of KXL's most ardent opponents.

The PSC is made up of four Republican commissioners and a lone Democratic chairwoman. None of them have shared their positions on KXL.

Kleeb said more than 100 people have lined up to oppose the pipeline before the PSC and that public campaigns are expected, and she has received dozens of calls from local landowners angry that the president would allow a foreign-sourced pipeline to intersect their land.

More than 80 landowners, she said, are refusing to allow TransCanada to cross their land in Nebraska and are planning to file a lawsuit should the company obtain a state permit.

TransCanada has long said it has the consent of most landowners along the pipeline's route through several states. The company may need to use eminent domain with holdouts.

Tribes set up camp

Tribal nations emboldened by the fight over the Dakota Access pipeline — including the Sioux and Cheyenne — are setting up camps along the KXL route to protest, and rallies are being organized along the East Coast and at the White House tonight.

Groups like Bold Alliance, the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council are preparing litigation focused on the State Department's giving KXL the green light. The groups point out that the agency used a 3-year-old review, which found that the project by itself would not significantly affect global climate-changing emissions.

The State Department, they charge, violated a key federal environmental law, the National Environmental Policy Act, by relying on arbitrary, stale and incomplete documents.

"The president said, 'I'll call Nebraska,' as if that would take care of the problem," said Bill McKibben, president of 350.org. "When he calls Nebraska, he'll get an earful."

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9. **FEDERAL AGENCIES: Lawmakers get behind open data bill**

E & E News, March 24 | Kevin Bogardus

Republican and Democratic lawmakers yesterday expressed support for legislation to make government information more accessible.

Their comments came during a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing on several transparency bills. Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) said the meeting was part of the panel's mission to foster transparency in government.

"We have an obligation to show the American people how their money is spent and how their government functions," Chaffetz said.

The bills on the agenda included Texas Republican Rep. Blake Farenthold's "[Open, Public, Electronic and Necessary Government Data Act](#)," plus measures to promote transparency at the Federal Reserve, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Farenthold's bill would have all government data put into a machine-readable format and posted online on data.gov. The government would also have to publish information in non-proprietary formats, making it free to use.

"Americans' tax dollars went to create [government data], the American people ought to have easy access to this data," said Farenthold, who chairs the Oversight Subcommittee on Interior, Energy and Environment.

The GOP-backed bill will likely have Democratic support. In his opening remarks, ranking member Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) said that he agrees with the proposal.

The open data legislation passed the Senate late last year but not the House (E&E Daily, Dec. 12, 2016).

Separately, Democrats used yesterday's hearing to push President Trump to disclose his tax returns, an issue they returned to again and again.

Cummings said Chaffetz should sign onto [H.R. 305](#), the "Presidential Tax Transparency Act," which has 73 co-sponsors, including one Republican, South Carolina Rep. Mark Sanford. The bill would require presidents and presidential candidates to disclose their tax returns.



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"We need to see the president's tax returns to confirm that he is acting in what he believes is the best interests of the American people rather than his own financial interests. President Trump's conflicts of interest are very, very real. They are extensive, and they are deeply troubling," Cummings said.

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10. **INTERIOR: Inside the Trump admin's favorite conservation coalition**

E & E News, March 24 | Corbin Hiar

On Ryan Zinke's first full day leading the Interior Department, he hosted top officials from more than a dozen sportsmen's groups — some of which were returning to the secretary's wood-paneled suite for the first time in years.

The gathering provided a glimpse of both how Zinke's conservation priorities will differ from his predecessor's and which organizations he's most likely to consult.

All but four of the 19 groups represented that day had one thing in common: They are part of American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP), a little-known consortium of sportsmen's groups that is poised to wield considerable influence at Interior in the coming years.

Some of the partner groups that sent executives to the meeting have deep ties to President Trump and Zinke.

The National Rifle Association, which had little high-level contact with Interior during the Obama era, spent more \$30.3 million during the 2016 race in support of Trump or targeting Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. That was more than any other outside group, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a money in politics watchdog organization.

During the same election cycle, the Safari Club International donated \$10,000 to the campaign of Zinke, who until earlier this month was Montana's lone Republican House member.

Other partner groups, such as the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), count Donald Trump Jr. as an active member.

Along with the rest of AWCP, they will be pushing Interior to support overhauling the Endangered Species Act, reining in environmental litigation and streamlining environmental reviews of timber projects. Those were among the policy recommendations to "conserve our fish,



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wildlife, and habitat resources long into the 21st century" that the consortium's 47 partner organizations sent to presidential candidates last year.

Though all the groups — from the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies to Ducks Unlimited — signed on to AWCP's "[Wildlife for the 21st Century](#)" report, some may push particular policies included in it, while others may stay silent.

"Not every group feels strong enough about [the recommendations] that they're going to put their name behind them," said Joel Pedersen, the director of conservation programs for the National Wild Turkey Federation and author of the report. "They're basically just not going to oppose them."

Pedersen wasn't able to attend the meeting with Zinke, which culminated in the signing of secretarial orders to expand access to public lands and revoke restrictions on lead ammunition and fishing tackle. But his Edgefield, S.C.-based group sent a consultant to represent NWTF's interests.

The consortium has no budget and no dedicated staff. While it is mentioned on the websites of many partner groups, AWCP itself doesn't have much of a presence online. A blog started by the consortium in 2012 has just two entries, the second of which leads to a now-defunct website.

The consortium's low public profile is no accident, according to Pedersen. AWCP is mainly a discussion forum intended to amplify the advocacy efforts of its partner groups, not overshadow them.

"Part of the rules of engagement, if you will, for us is that AWCP does not take a position on behalf of any organization, and no other organization takes a position on behalf of any other organization," he said. "So everybody pretty much speaks for themselves."

Room for disagreement

That arrangement allows the National Wildlife Federation — one of the more conservation-minded AWCP groups — to distance itself from the consortium's more controversial environmental recommendations. NWF only joined AWCP late last year.

"We tend to have concerns about more extractive industries than maybe some of the other groups, given some of the habitat impacts," said Collin O'Mara, the president and CEO of NWF. "That's just one example."



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The energy section of the AWCP report, which features an image of elk running past an oil jack pump, doesn't mention climate change and seems to equate concerns about all energy sources. At the same time, it says "energy self-sufficiency" is a "high national priority" and urges federal and state wildlife agencies to "start integrating energy development considerations into their overall management plans on both public and private lands."

NWF supports phasing out the use of wildlife-poisoning lead bullets and ammunition. That put O'Mara in an awkward position when Interior turned AWCP's meet-and-greet with Zinke into a photo op for the secretarial order signings (E&E News PM, March 2).

"We were there to support the secretary on his first day, not endorsing any of the individual actions," he said. "But we do think that having a science-based collaborative process to try to reduce lead, an approach that's going to last across administrations, ... is critical."

The phaseout of lead ammunition and fishing lures was quietly implemented by former Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe on his last full day in office (E&E News PM, Jan. 23).

Yet O'Mara emphasized that "we generally support the overall agenda" of AWCP, as represented in the report. "I think what you see in this document is an acknowledgment of the wildlife crisis that we're facing and that we can't simply just regulate our way to recovering wildlife populations," he added.

The sportsmen's coalition also has bipartisan appeal for NWF, which has a network of affiliate organizations in blue states as well as the red ones where most hunters and anglers tend to be found.

"We look more like the country in terms of political identity ... than any of the other [conservation] groups," O'Mara said. "So to not be engaged with the leading sportsmen's groups that are most engaged in wildlife issues was something that we needed to fix."

The consortium has been meeting regularly to share information about issues affecting the sportsmen's community since 2000.

NWF attended the most recent AWCP gathering earlier this month in Spokane, Wash., on the sidelines of the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. About two-thirds of the partner organizations were present. AWCP's next meeting is scheduled for August.

Funding fears



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Even more than in the last eight years, the traditional hook-and-bullet crowd is ready and willing to work with the new administration.

"It's pretty clear that Trump and Don Trump Jr. and Zinke all value the importance of the sportsmen community," said TRCP President and CEO Whit Fosburgh, who was also in the room with Zinke on his first full day in office. "We have access, and we're in a good position to make our voices heard in this administration."

Fosburgh, however, still sees cause for concern in the White House's initial budget proposal.

"Conservation programs have basically been starved since the 1970s," he said. "A lot of that foments the anger — legitimate anger — you see in a lot of the Western states about poor management of our public lands. To get around that, we have to have strong investment."

But the budget blueprint the White House released earlier this month would provide Interior with \$11.6 billion next year, a decrease of \$1.5 billion from current levels for the already squeezed agency (Greenwire, March 20).

"You can't have the Department of the Interior taking a 10 percent cut and expect to be a successful secretary of the Interior," Fosburgh warned. "So Zinke will be judged by how well he can elevate that department within the broader fight on the budget in that administration. I think that's going to be his first and perhaps biggest test that he has."

AWCP groups wrote Trump in February asking him to increase "investments in natural infrastructure." The [letter](#) specifically called for the administration to dedicate 5 percent of its promised \$1 trillion infrastructure package to "conservation investments that will grow America's outdoor economy" and to invest "a portion of the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund in habitat restoration."

While the White House hasn't yet detailed its infrastructure plans, the [budget blueprint](#) called for the elimination of some Abandoned Mine Land grants.

Greens shut out

Other AWCP groups that sent officials to meet with Zinke on day one include the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the Boone and Crockett Club, the Wild Sheep Foundation, the Archery Trade Association, the Mule Deer Foundation, Pheasants Forever and the Wildlife Management Institute.



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Unaffiliated representatives from the American Recreation Coalition, Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, the American Sportfishing Association and the National Marine Manufacturers Association also attended.

Notably absent from that gathering was anyone from environmental groups such as Defenders of Wildlife, which had deep ties to the Obama and Clinton administrations (Greenwire, May 1, 2015).

"I would suspect that the traditional greens are not going to have nearly as much influence with this Department of the Interior as they did with the previous one," said Eric Washburn, the president and CEO of Windward Strategies, an energy and environment lobby shop.

"Sportsmen's groups tend to be politically more conservative than green groups and, I think, methodologically more conservative than green groups," said Washburn, a former adviser to Senate Majority Leaders Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Tom Daschle (D-S.D.). "They're less histrionic, they're less vocal, they're more sort of seeking balance, and I suspect that's where Zinke is going to be on many issues — more of a conservationist seeking balance and accommodation and less of a preservationist."

Since meeting with representatives from AWCP, Zinke has taken a couple of symbolic steps to bolster his sportsman's cred. His office now features Ron, an elk trophy he bagged in Montana; Rosie the bison; and an as-yet-unnamed grizzly bear.

Even if environmental groups wanted to partner with the sportsmen's community, it's unlikely many of the AWCP groups would welcome them into the newly ascendant consortium.

"The animal rights groups, the anti-groups, no, they're not really in that circle," said Pedersen of NWTF. "I'm not sure what it's going to take to bring them into the fold."

Traditional environmental outfits "are more prone to litigation and fighting about things," he said. "I know it will be hard for the NWTF to work with those groups, and I think it will be difficult for many of the groups that are a part of AWCP. It's a difference in philosophy in how we approach trying to get things done."

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11. **SUPREME COURT: Democrats attempt to block Gorsuch, set up Senate fight**

E & E News, March 24 | Emily Holden

Senate Democrats will try to block Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch, even if it means Republicans decide to change the rules to confirm him.

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) announced on the Senate floor yesterday that he would vote against Gorsuch and that Democrats would require he meet a 60-vote threshold to move forward.

"If this nominee cannot earn 60 votes — a bar met by each of President Obama's nominees and George Bush's last two nominees — the answer isn't to change the rules. It's to change the nominee," Schumer said.

Republicans would need to pick up eight Democrats willing to vote to move to confirm Gorsuch, assuming no GOP senators oppose him. They don't appear to have the numbers to overcome a filibuster without changing the rules, although that could change.

Republican leaders have threatened to confirm Gorsuch with a simple majority if they must, a move that would upend Senate protocol. That would follow years of escalation. When Democrats were in the majority, they went against Senate rules and confirmed Obama administration nominees after years of Republican opposition. GOP senators then refused to confirm Obama's pick for the Supreme Court, Merrick Garland.

How the fight plays out now will have lasting effects on how the Senate operates, as well as how easily Republicans could advance future Trump picks.

Schumer charged that Gorsuch was "groomed by billionaire conservatives" and that he hadn't shown he could be a check on Trump's executive power. What's at stake is "not at all abstract," he said, and will "echo through the lifetime tenure" of Gorsuch through a generation of Americans.

Meanwhile, the Judiciary Committee spent the last day of Gorsuch's hearing listening to witnesses testify for and against him.

Very little of the proceedings touched on the environment or climate change, although Democrats on Monday and Tuesday questioned Gorsuch about his view that agencies should not



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have as much latitude as they have been allowed to interpret laws. They argued Gorsuch would promote corporations over people.

Clean Power Plan decision the 'big enchilada'

Pat Gallagher, the director of the environmental law program at the Sierra Club who testified against Gorsuch yesterday, said afterward he wished questions would focus more on climate, drinking water and air pollution, "particularly because those issues may overrun everything else if the climate crisis unfolds as it's being predicted."

Gorsuch could vote on the legality of the Clean Power Plan, the Obama administration's climate standards for the electricity system, Gallagher said. The Trump administration plans to unravel that regulation, although it's still under court consideration.

"That's the big enchilada of climate law right now," he said. "It's the tool that the Obama administration put into place to meet the Paris goals and try to attack climate change. It's huge."

Gallagher said Gorsuch's "antipathy toward administrative agencies" doesn't bode well for the climate rule. He argued the complexity of modern environmental problems requires expert action.

"There's no way Congress is going to legislate every last detail. ... They have to delegate that to the agencies," he said.

Senate leaders want to move to confirm Gorsuch following an April 3 committee vote and before the Easter recess starting the next weekend. A filibuster could make that harder, as Republicans consider their next move.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) said the 60-vote threshold represents the "standard" for nominees.

"He'll saddle up with the other four conservative justices to recreate the Gang of Five and go back on their shopping spree, which I think is very unjudicial and has done a lot of harm to the country," Whitehouse said in a brief interview.

The last Supreme Court nominee who faced a filibuster was Justice Samuel Alito. The Senate voted to consider his nomination 72-25 and then confirmed him 58-42. Other nominees, including Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Antonin Scalia, were confirmed nearly unanimously.



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Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) told reporters yesterday that "there's no reason for anybody to filibuster."

"Gorsuch is a good guy," she said.

Murkowski and other moderate Republicans could ultimately hold leaders back from changing Senate rules to advance Gorsuch, although they haven't signaled whether they would. Sen. Joe Manchin, a conservative Democrat from West Virginia, told The Washington Post he needed to hear more from the nominee before voting for him but warned Democrats not to filibuster and risk a rules change.

News on Democrats' plans to filibuster was breaking yesterday as GOP lawmakers in the House were forced to reschedule a vote on repealing and replacing Obama's signature health care law. That vote will be another major test of Trump's ability to work with Republicans in Congress to implement his agenda.

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12. **NATURAL RESOURCES: Democrats summon Zinke to testify on budget**

E & E News, March 24 | Pamela King

A group of Democratic lawmakers are calling on Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to explain how his agency would fulfill its responsibilities following a 12 percent budget cut.

In a letter to House Natural Resources Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah), Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.), the panel's ranking member, questioned a budget proposal that recommended slashing Interior funding by \$1.5 billion in fiscal 2018 while prioritizing fossil fuel extraction on federal lands.

The White House offered few specifics on how the cut would be spread across the agency (Energywire, March 17).

"Given the lack of detail provided in the President's proposal, it is critical that Secretary Zinke appear before the Committee to explain how the Department plans to fulfill its responsibilities to manage our National Parks and other federal lands, oceans, endangered wildlife, cultural resources, and honor the federal government's trust responsibilities to Native American Tribes using \$1.5 billion less in funding," the [letter](#) says.



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Since President Trump took office, Interior has ignored at least five communication attempts from Grijalva, according to the letter.

"A period of adjustment at the dawn of a new Administration is to be expected," Grijalva wrote. "Months of deliberate silence on each and every significant issue facing the Department is not. A sustained refusal to even acknowledge inquiries from the Congress is not."

In one of those attempts — on Feb. 28 — Grijalva asked acting Secretary Jack Haugrud for information regarding the department's decision to attempt to postpone the effective date of the Consolidated Federal Oil and Gas and Federal and Indian Coal Valuation Reform Rule.

Many of Grijalva's communication efforts pre-dated Zinke's tenure, said Bishop spokeswoman Molly Block.

"Maybe ranking member Grijalva should direct his concerns at Senate Democrats, who have delayed confirmations at a level not seen before," she said. "To try and blame Secretary Zinke for inaction before he was even confirmed is silly."

Block did not say whether Bishop would schedule a hearing.

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