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From: Kimberly Finch
Sent: 2017-06-22T19:26:37-04:00
Importance: Normal
Subject: Fwd: From E&E News PM -- NATIONAL MONUMENTS: Not every review is a 'deep dive' — Zinke
Received: 2017-06-22T19:27:43-04:00

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NATIONAL MONUMENTS

Not every review is a 'deep dive' — Zinke

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

Published: Thursday, June 22, 2017

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Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke on Capitol Hill this morning. House Natural Resources Committee
/YouTube

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke revealed today that his agency's review of dozens of national monuments is now focused "on just a few" sites, although he did not detail which, if any, have completed assessments.

During testimony today before the House Natural Resources Committee on the fiscal 2018 budget, Zinke reiterated his assertion that the review of 27 national monuments is not aimed at "settled" sites but those he believes either failed to gather sufficient public input or remain areas of contention for local communities.

"My intent on the monument review is to ensure that the — some of them monuments are settled — my intent was not, and I've said before, to rip off Band-Aids and then create wounds where there [are] none," Zinke said.

The Interior Department is reviewing the boundaries of dozens of protected areas, including five marine monuments, under an executive order issued by President

Trump in late April.

The review is focused on sites created since 1996 that include more than 100,000 acres of public land or water. Zinke has already issued an interim report recommending significant cuts to the Bears Ears monument in Utah, although he has not provided details about how many acres would be included in the reduction (*[E&E News PM](#)*, June 12).

Interior must issue its final recommendations by Aug. 24. But Zinke revealed today that his department will not make detailed inquiries into each of the monuments on its list.

"I think we're focusing on just a few," Zinke told Rep. Scott Tipton (R-Colo.).

Asked for clarification following his testimony, Zinke told reporters that he would talk to lawmakers and constituents with ties to the sites under review but, "We're not taking a deep dive in all of them."

Earlier this week, Zinke told Sen. Cory Gardner (R-Colo.) that the Canyons of the Ancients National Monument was among those sites not on his agency's "priority review list" (*[E&E News PM](#)*, June 20).

But he declined to offer similar assurances to Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) yesterday when asked about the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks and Rio Grande del Norte monuments (*[Greenwire](#)*, June 21).

Rep. Steve Pearce (R-N.M.) today pushed Zinke to shrink Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks, calling it "a very highly volatile issue in the district" and suggesting it should be reduced to 60,000 acres from 497,000 acres. Zinke did not have an opportunity to respond to Pearce's comments during the hearing.

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