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From: Webster, Sarah
Sent: 2017-04-28T10:53:32-04:00
Importance: Normal
Subject: BLM-CA in the News, April 28
Received: 2017-04-28T10:54:03-04:00
[New Clips 4 28 LONG.pdf](#)

CALIFORNIA

House Natural Resources Committee backs Doug LaMalfa bill protecting transmission lines

Statesman Journal, April 27

A bill intended to prevent dying trees damaged by drought from falling onto utility lines on publicly owned federal land, sparking wildfires and electricity blackouts, passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee on Thursday. The bill, sponsored by Reps. Doug LaMalfa, R-Richvale, Calif., and Kurt Schrader, D-Canby, Oregon, would promote federal land management agencies' and private utilities' clearance of dangerously compromised trees and other vegetation from the roughly 90,000 miles of electrical transmission line rights of way running through U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands. *See PDF for full story.*

Burro trapped on Lake McClure island

The Union Democrat, April 4

Harry Markarian, a retired police detective who fishes frequently at Lake McClure, said he first saw the lone burro stranded on an island in the reservoir about three months ago. He's been working ever since to get the animal reunited with about 20 burros on the shore...These days, the Bureau of Land Management tries to control wild horse and burro populations that roam public lands in the West under the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971. Annually, the BLM oversees capture of thousands of mustangs and burros and places many of them up for adoption.

President Trump's move to review national monuments prompts local concern

Santa Rosa Press Democrat, April 25

Local lawmakers and community leaders are wary about President Donald Trump's call for a review of national monument designations, including two on the North Coast. Trump is expected Wednesday to sign an executive order requiring Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to assess all national monuments designated since 1996 with an eye toward determining whether the process has been abused.

Don't mess with California's national monuments

Sacramento Bee, opinion piece, April 26

Donald Trump is all about states' rights that is until it comes to California and its national monuments. On Wednesday, the president signed a potentially disastrous executive order, directing Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review the status of 24 federally protected swathes of land and water. Although we won't know much more until this summer, the order could lead to the reduction or even elimination of monuments designated by three previous presidents.

Trump directives target the Carrizo Plain, offshore drilling

New Times, April 26

This spring, the Carrizo Plain National Monument's super bloom is drawing visitors from near and far, but now it's under review by a Trump administration looking to limit its boundary lines or revoke its protection altogether. President Donald Trump signed an executive order on April 26 directing U.S. Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke to revisit the status of at least two dozen national monuments including the Carrizo Plain designated by previous presidents under the Antiquities Act of 1906. The order instructs Zinke to review all national monuments that were designated after 1996 that encompass more than 100,000 acres. Monuments in California that fall under that category are the Carrizo Plain, Berryessa Snow Mountain, Cascade-Siskiyou, Giant Sequoia, Mojave Trails, San Gabriel Mountains, and Sand to Snow.

Letter: Park ranger job more complex than it seems

ChicoER, editorial, April 26

...The board stated "Most park rangers we know pursue the field because they love the park ... not because they want to become cops." This statement is insensitive to the approximately 600 California State Parks rangers, 3,000 National Park Service rangers, 350 Bureau of Land Management rangers and several California city and county agency park rangers.

How a California Anesthesiologist Became One of America's Largest Antiquities Looters

Men's Journal, April 18

...Within months, the respected anesthesiologist would find himself facing 21 felony counts and at the center of a criminal investigation that became one of the largest stolen-goods cases in the history of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). But to hear Bourne tell it, he's just a passionate collector who took a few items to ensure they weren't lost to time..."Bourne gave us extremely rare things that are not found in North America," says BLM archaeologist Greg Haverstock, who was tasked with taking inventory of the cache.

NATIONAL

Trump tweet on closures at odds with Zinke's promise

E&E News, April 27

President Trump warned today that national parks could close if the government shuts down, seemingly contradicting Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. "As families prepare for summer vacations in our National Parks Democrats threaten to close them and shut down the government. Terrible!" Trump wrote in a tweet earlier today. Congress will likely pass a short-term stopgap spending bill to prevent a government shutdown tomorrow. Trump's tweet comes as lawmakers from both parties voice optimism that they will come to a deal on a final package for fiscal 2017. *See PDF for full story.*

AP Explains: Trump order sets up legal clash over vast lands

Daily Mail, April 26

President Donald Trump's order for the government to review national monuments created by several of his predecessors sets up a legal showdown over whether one chief executive has the power to undo another's decisions. At stake are federal lands revered for their natural beauty and historical significance. The review goes well beyond a few declarations made in the waning months of Barack Obama's term. It covers 24 monuments established by three former presidents over more than two decades.

Trump order will 'correct past abuses' Sen. Hatch

E&E Daily, April 28

Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch (R) asserted yesterday that the Trump administration's review of dozens of national monuments will "correct past abuses" of the Antiquities Act and called for the creation of a "new process" to be used for future monument designations. Hatch, who spoke on the Senate floor last night, also expended time broadly praising President Trump for signing the executive order Wednesday that directed the Interior Department to review a slew of monuments created since 1996 and make recommendations to eliminate, reduce or alter the management of those sites. *See PDF for full story.*

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CALIFORNIA

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Statesman Journal, April 27

A bill intended to prevent dying trees damaged by drought from falling onto utility lines on publicly owned federal land, sparking wildfires and electricity blackouts, passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee on Thursday.

The bill, sponsored by Reps. Doug LaMalfa, R-Richvale, Calif., and Kurt Schrader, D-Canby, Oregon, would promote federal land management agencies' and private utilities' clearance of dangerously compromised trees and other vegetation from the roughly 90,000 miles of electrical transmission line rights of way running through U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands.

When a right of way is not properly maintained, dead and dying trees can fall on transmission lines, sparking wildfires and electricity blackouts. It happened in 1996, knocking out power to 7.5 million people in 14 Western states, and again in 2003, producing an outage affecting 50 million utility customers in the Northeast.

The bill also addresses utility company concerns about potential falling trees outside their rights of way, such as one that caused a wildfire near La Pine, Oregon. In that case, the U.S. Forest Service had denied a request for tree-trimming and Midstate Electric Cooperative had to pay \$326,850 in firefighting costs. The LaMalfa-Schrader bill would make the federal agencies that denied requested mitigation efforts liable for subsequent fire-fighting costs.

The Forest Service reported 113 wildfires in 2013 and 232 in 2012 caused by contacts between power lines and trees on its lands. The bill defines a "hazard tree" as one within the utility right of way or outside it if, should it fall, it would cause a high risk of disruption within 10 feet of a transmission line.

A similar bill was introduced last year by then Rep. Ryan Zinke, R-Montana, who would be tasked with implementing this year's measure as the new secretary of the Interior. The committee voted 24-14 to recommend the bill favorably to the full House.

"Rep. Schrader and I have worked together to ensure this legislation moves forward and addresses a real world problem affecting forest health and safety," La Malfa said in a statement after the vote. "Our bill removes existing red tape that will allow for more streamlined removal of trees that have potential of falling on a power line and causing blackouts or forest fires, as has occurred before. We've had strong support from both sides of the aisle along with many local utility companies and power providers located in Northern California and beyond."

Said Schrader: “Our bill is a no-brainer and a great example of the bipartisan work this Congress can achieve when we work together. This bill will finally cut the red tape to create a streamlined and consistent process for removing hazardous trees and vegetation without wasting time and money before it can cause a wildfire. Preventing forest fires and maintaining a reliable electrical grid for our communities is an obvious priority for everybody.”

The bill was co-sponsored by Reps. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo.; Jim Costa, D-Calif.; Bruce Westerman, R-Ariz.; Tom O’Halloran, D-Ariz.; Stevan Pearce, R-N.M.; and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz.

The Natural Resources Committee also voted 23-16 to affirm a settlement agreement between the Westlands Water District and the federal government, ending a 17-year dispute over drainage in the San Luis Unit of California’s Central Valley Project. The underlying bill also directs the Department of the Interior to enter into a contract to provide project water to the Lamoore Naval Air Station spanning Kings and Fresno counties.

According to the Bureau of Reclamation, the settlement is in the best interests of the U.S. because it limits exposure to billions of dollars in potential liability. The settlement requires Westlands to permanently retire 100,000 acres within its jurisdiction while relieving the utility district of \$375 million in Central Valley Project construction costs. The bill now moves to the House floor for a vote.

NATIONAL

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President Trump warned today that national parks could close if the government shuts down, seemingly contradicting Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. "As families prepare for summer vacations in our National Parks — Democrats threaten to close them and shut down the government. Terrible!"

Trump wrote in a tweet earlier today. Congress will likely pass a short-term stopgap spending bill to prevent a government shutdown tomorrow. Trump's tweet comes as lawmakers from both parties voice optimism that they will come to a deal on a final package for fiscal 2017.

His tweet is also at odds with Zinke's comments earlier this month at Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks. Several media outlets reported that Zinke promised to keep parks open in a government shutdown. According to Capital Public Radio, Zinke said parks such as Yosemite, Sequoia and Kings Canyon would continue operating.

None of the outlets directly quoted Zinke, and Interior spokeswoman Heather Swift said he was referring to "open parks and monuments like the National Mall."

Swift pointed to the 2013 government shutdown, when Republicans blasted the National Park Service for closed monuments in Washington. They focused on a group of war veterans who were initially barred from entering the World War II and Vietnam Veterans memorials.

At the time, NPS said it did not have the staff to keep an eye on monuments and thus had to deter visitors to ensure no damage.

Trump order will 'correct past abuses' — Sen. Hatch

E&E Daily, April 28

Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch (R) asserted yesterday that the Trump administration's review of dozens of national monuments will "correct past abuses" of the Antiquities Act and called for the creation of a "new process" to be used for future monument designations.

Hatch, who spoke on the Senate floor last night, also expended time broadly praising President Trump for signing the executive order Wednesday that directed the Interior Department to review a slew of monuments created since 1996 and make recommendations to eliminate, reduce or alter the management of those sites (Greenwire, April 26).

"Better than any of his predecessors, President Trump understands the lasting damage wrought by past presidents under the Antiquities Act," Hatch asserted, referring to the 1906 law that allows the nation's chief executive to designate existing federal lands for protection of historic, cultural or scientific importance.

He added: "Indeed, in all my years of public service, I have never seen a president so committed to reining in the federal government and so eager to address the problems caused by these overreaching monument designations."

Hatch, a staunch critic of monuments in his home state of Utah including the Bears Ears National Monument created by President Obama and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument created by President Clinton, claimed that past presidents have "brandished" the law as "a weapon to cut up entire sections of our state."

"But I'm encouraged by yesterday's executive order with President Trump and [Interior] Secretary [Ryan] Zinke on our side," Hatch said. "I believe we can plot a path forward to correct past abuses and forge a new precedent for future monument designations."

Hatch, who hosted a meeting with Utah's congressional delegation and Zinke in his office yesterday morning, also suggested that Congress should pursue new legislation that would require its approval, as well as that of "impacted national communities" for new monuments.

Utah Gov. Gary Herbert (R), who also attended the briefing with Zinke in Hatch's office, wrote on his Twitter account that the session was "an open and frank dialogue" as Zinke "begins reviewing national monuments."

Zinke said Wednesday that he plans to visit the Bears Ears site in early May, but no additional details on his trip have been made available.