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Mr. Zinke, Keep Channeling Teddy Roosevelt

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/08/opinion/ryan-zinke-keep-channeling-teddy-roosevelt.html>

On his first day on the job, Ryan Zinke, President Trump's secretary of the interior, rode a horse to work, in plain imitation of Teddy Roosevelt, who as president used to gallop around Washington, and whose admirable record as a conservationist Mr. Zinke says he hopes to emulate. By all accounts, Mr. Zinke, a former Navy SEALs member and congressman from Montana, is not a dope. He therefore knows that he cannot possibly match Mr. Roosevelt if he embraces the dismaying anti-environmental agenda Mr. Trump has saddled him with.

As David Roberts of Vox has pointed out, that agenda is both plutocratic and lazy. It seeks to confer new benefits on oil and gas interests that are already richly favored. Yet it requires nothing of Mr. Trump himself. All he has done is issue executive orders that tell someone else to do the work. He cannot scrap the clean power rule or President Barack Obama's aggressive fuel efficiency standards; the relevant federal agencies will have to face the laborious and uncertain process of writing new rules and whatever court challenges those rules bring.

In similar fashion, in two separate orders, Mr. Trump has instructed Mr. Zinke to review Obama policies designed to protect important landscapes for the enjoyment of future generations and the oceans from catastrophic oil spills. The wording in both orders makes it clear that Mr. Trump wants the policies revised or jettisoned altogether, and in the end, great damage could be inflicted on the environment. It's up to Mr. Zinke to make sure that does not happen.

One order instructs Mr. Zinke to review all national monument designations made under the Antiquities Act after Jan. 1, 1996, that encompass 100,000 or more acres. Since Mr. Roosevelt signed the law in 1906, eight Republican (including T.R.) and eight Democratic presidents have used it to unilaterally protect threatened landscapes from commercial intrusion. Mr.

Trump complains that such designations prohibit new mining and drilling projects that could create jobs, but a close look at his order shows that it makes no economic sense and is little more than cynical genuflection to the Utah congressional delegation.

The order's bookends are the 1.9 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, established by President Bill Clinton in 1996, and the 1.35 million-acre Bears Ears National Monument established just last year by Mr. Obama. The designations have stuck in the craw of two Republican warhorses, Senator Orrin Hatch and Representative Rob Bishop.

Both monuments contain magnificent landscapes and priceless artifacts. Neither contains significant oil and gas reserves, and the Grand Staircase designation has led to a big growth in tourism. Bears Ears is likely to do the same. Both have popular support, and both are best left alone.

The second order deals with oil and gas exploration. The United States is producing robust supplies, from both federal and private lands, but the oil industry wants more, and so does Mr. Trump. He has therefore ordered Mr. Zinke to draw up a new five-year exploration plan, roll back an Obama rule from last December withdrawing America's Arctic waters from drilling, and "reconsider" several safety regulations implemented after the disastrous BP oil spill.

Five-year plans come and go; every nearly every administration draws up a new one. Mr. Trump's plan calls for drilling in the Atlantic, an idea Mr. Obama rejected after protests from coastal states. The instructions on Alaska and safety precautions are simply irresponsible. Mr. Obama withdrew Alaskan waters using existing legal authority and for a very good reason: An oil spill in the inhospitable waters of the Arctic would be a disaster. Further, after Shell's bumbling and ultimately fruitless \$7 billion attempt to find oil, companies have been abandoning old leases right and left, and, whatever their ambitions elsewhere, do not seem to be seeking new ones in the Arctic.

As for revising and presumably weakening the safety regulations — common-sense efforts to strengthen specific pieces of offshore drilling equipment, like blowout preventers, that failed in the 2010 gulf disaster — it's hard to believe that even industry wants something that stupid.

Back to Mr. Zinke's first day on the job. The day after he got off his horse, he addressed his employees and promised to defend them against brutal budget cuts that Mr. Trump had already threatened. That's all well and good, but the real measure of his leadership is whether he will also defend the crucially important work his employees are involved in, and, like Mr. Roosevelt, decide to protect and add to the public lands and waters instead of diminishing them.