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Kevin Bogardus and Kellie Lunney, E&E News reporters

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

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<http://bit.ly/2ve7LGK>

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As the Bureau of Land Management's backlog of outstanding applications to drill on public lands shrinks, the number of tracts that have been approved for development but have gone unused is on the rise.

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

3. Senate Dems push back against Trump rule delays

Scott Streater, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

A coalition of 27 senators, all Democrats, are asking President Trump to "fully implement" two Obama-era rules designed to cut methane emissions from oil and natural gas drilling operations.

<http://bit.ly/2uR8ZIr>

4. Zinke adds 7 staffers to department team

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke is getting some much-needed reinforcements this week, with the addition of staffers in some key areas.

<http://bit.ly/2ujOuY6>

5. Chaos or conspiracy? Key posts vacant as nominations lag

Hannah Northey, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

President Trump blasted Democrats on Twitter this week for blocking his nominees, but he's about six weeks off the pace set by his predecessors for picking people to fill more than 1,200 jobs that need Senate confirmation.

<http://bit.ly/2tNmhp7>

6. States meet with Zinke panel on changes to federal plans

Scott Streater, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

Members of a panel established by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review the Obama administration's sweeping greater sage grouse conservation plans are meeting this week in Denver with Western state leaders to gather feedback about the plans and how they should be revised, sources said.

<http://bit.ly/2vdz8R2>

7. Former lobbyist and Hill staffer nabs prime post

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

The Trump administration has named former lobbyist and congressional staffer Todd Willens to serve as an assistant deputy secretary in the Interior Department.

<http://bit.ly/2sR6t3D>

8. Think tank wrote Utah Bears Ears bill; Republican bashed Zinke

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

New documents obtained by a Montana-based government watchdog show that a conservative think tank is the primary author of a Utah legislative resolution earlier this year calling for the elimination of the Bears Ears National Monument.

<http://bit.ly/2vdiTU8>

9. House passes anti-discrimination, land bills

Cecelia Smith-Schoenwalder, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

The House yesterday passed legislation by voice vote to strengthen anti-discrimination laws for federal government workers.

<http://bit.ly/2t4gQoF>

10. Despite recess delay, Senate may punt on energy bill

Geof Koss and George Cahlink, E&E News reporters

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's decision to delay the start of the August recess may help clear some of the backlog of pending executive branch nominees but may not open the path for the bipartisan energy reform bill, Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski said yesterday.

<http://bit.ly/2sQvN9W>

11. Coal got knocked out in Calif. Now, gas is on the ropes

Debra Kahn, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

A wave of regulatory reconsiderations of natural gas-fired power plants in California has renewables advocates cheering.

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

12. House appropriates rider blocks ESA protection for gray wolves

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

A rider tucked into a House spending bill released yesterday would bar the Interior Department from issuing federal protections for gray wolves across the continental United States.

<http://bit.ly/2t3QUJV>

13. Wilderness Society hires firm with Trump ties

Nick Bowlin, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

The Wilderness Society has signed with a top law and lobbying shop run by one of President Trump's personal attorneys.

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

14. Price tag for senior lifetime passes to spike 700% in August

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

The National Park Service has set Aug. 28 as the date for a rate hike in senior citizen lifetime passes.

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

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1. Subcommittee approves Interior-EPA bill

[Kevin Bogardus](#) and [Kellie Lunney](#), E&E News reporters

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

House appropriators this afternoon approved the always-controversial bill to fund U.S. EPA and the Department of the Interior with dissent from Democrats.

The Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee passed the measure by voice vote, leaving more in-depth deliberations for when the full committee acts sometime in the future.

The legislation offers substantial budget cuts to EPA and Interior, though not as deep as proposed by President Trump's fiscal 2018 budget.

The bill would cut EPA by more than \$500 million, from \$8.06 billion to \$7.5 billion. In contrast, the president had proposed to give the agency \$5.6 billion.

For Interior, the bill would provide \$11.9 billion. That's slightly more than the \$11.7 billion the White House requested, but less than the \$12.3 billion Congress appropriated in the fiscal 2017 omnibus.

Worried about the Interior-EPA bill's proposed cuts and their impact on the environment and public health, subcommittee ranking member Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) said she couldn't support it in its current form.

She praised money for the National Park Service's Historic Preservation Fund, as well as dollars for programs critical to Indian country, including for education, law enforcement and health. But McCollum expressed unhappiness with wildfire disaster funding.

"The bill recommends \$3.4 billion, or 11 percent of the subcommittee's total allocation, for wildland fire, but once again, the majority has failed to adopt the common-sense reforms championed in Chairman [Mike] Simpson's [R-Idaho] wildfire disaster funding bill," she said.

McCollum, long a strong champion of environment-related programs, also noted that "EPA is hit hardest by the cuts in this bill."

Full committee ranking member Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) similarly said the legislation would be a "disaster" for the environment and public health, and does nothing to address climate change.

"Unfortunately, the bill before us ignores that reality," Lowey said.

EPA programs

For EPA, the legislation supports the agency's coming buyout program by providing \$58 million for workforce restructuring, said a House Appropriations Committee aide.

Even though appropriators followed the president's lead on workforce reductions, they ignored the White House on many programs (*E&E News PM*, July 11).

Targeted Air Shed grants would get \$40 million in the House bill, rather than being voided, as proposed by the White House budget.

Diesel Emissions Reduction Act grants would get a funding boost from \$60 million this year to \$75 million next year. The White House had slated those grants to receive \$10 million.

Cleanup efforts for the Chesapeake Bay and the Great Lakes would keep their funding levels of \$72 million and \$300 million, respectively, despite President Trump's plans to eliminate EPA's geographic programs.

The legislation would also provide more than \$1.1 billion for the Superfund program, much more than the \$515.8 million requested by the president's budget.

That pleased Appropriations Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.), who said his state has more Superfund sites than any other in the country.

"I'm just pleased that this bill continues to support ongoing cleanup efforts," Frelinghuysen said.

The Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board would receive \$11 million. The agency was set for elimination in Trump's budget.

EPA riders

Drafters tucked several policy riders, including a requirement that agencies continue to treat forest biomass as carbon-neutral and a ban on agencies requiring Clean Air Act permits for carbon dioxide, methane and other gases from livestock production.

The bill also takes aim at the Clean Water Rule, making it easier for EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers to withdraw the Obama-era regulation.

Other riders seem designed to shield farms from EPA, such as a prohibition on agency scrutiny for mandatory reporting of greenhouse gas emissions from manure management systems, as well as blocking regulators from issuing new Solid Waste Disposal Act rules on animal feeding operations.

In addition, the spending bill would stop EPA from requiring hardrock mines to adhere to a new financial assurance requirements under the Superfund program.

McCollum took aim at the policy riders in the appropriations legislation. "In my opinion, they benefit polluters," she said.

Environmental groups pushed back against the bill's slashing of EPA funds, saying the agency has been cut enough in recent years.

In a statement, Elizabeth Thompson, president of EDF Action, urged lawmakers on the subcommittee "to oppose any cuts to EPA from current levels."

"The American people depend on a well-funded EPA to help provide clean air, clean water, and a safe climate. Any cuts to EPA's already historically low budget — which has been cut 25 percent since 2010 — would put our children's health at risk," Thompson said.

Interior

House appropriators also bucked the White House on Interior Department programs. They, for example, want to fully fund the payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) system at \$465 million and provide \$275 million for Land and Water Conservation Fund programs.

The administration proposed \$397 million for PILT in fiscal 2018, and \$26 million in discretionary money for LWCF in its budget blueprint.

The bill hewed to the administration's recommendation on wildfire firefighting and prevention, fully funding the 10-year average for suppression costs for Interior and the Forest Service with \$3.4 billion. That's \$334 million below the fiscal 2017 level.

Several Interior agencies would see cuts:

- The Bureau of Land Management would receive \$1.2 billion, a decrease of \$46 million from fiscal 2017. The spending legislation would provide \$68.9 million for sage grouse conservation.
- The National Park Service would receive \$2.9 billion, a decrease of \$64 million from fiscal 2017, mostly a reduction in land acquisition activities.

- The Fish and Wildlife Service would receive \$1.5 billion under the bill, \$38 million less than the fiscal 2017 level. The fiscal 2018 bill also continues a one-year delay on Endangered Species Act reviews and rulemakings for sage grouse.
- The U.S. Geological Survey would receive \$1 billion in fiscal 2018 under the bill, \$46 million below the fiscal 2017 enacted level.
- Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement would receive \$213 million for fiscal 2018, \$40 million less than in fiscal 2017. That includes \$75 million to continue a pilot program to reclaim abandoned mines and promote coal field economic growth, and \$68.6 million for state regulatory grants.
- The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement would get \$136 million under the fiscal 2018 spending legislation, much less than the \$204.9 million the Trump administration requested and less than the \$190 million it received in the omnibus. Appropriators allocated \$12.7 million for the oil spill research fund, \$2.2 million less than what the fund received in this year's omnibus spending bill.
- The Bureau of Indian Affairs and Education would receive \$2.9 billion, \$10 million more than the fiscal 2017 enacted level. That includes money for schools, law enforcement and infrastructure. The Indian Health Service would get \$5.1 billion in fiscal 2018, \$97 million more than the enacted level in fiscal 2017.
- The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management would receive \$171 million in fiscal 2018 under the bill, in keeping with the White House's proposal, and a slight boost from the amount appropriated in the fiscal 2017 omnibus.

Interior riders

Other Interior riders include language prohibiting the department from issuing federal protections for gray wolves across the continental United States and a provision barring funds for an Obama-era executive order creating a national ocean policy.

"It's certainly commendable that appropriators rejected the president's horrible budget and sought to minimize damage to the Park Service, but it's a very disappointing bill for national parks," said John Garder, director of budget and appropriations at the National Parks Conservation Association.

He added: "At a time when visitation is at an all-time high and parks are considerably challenged by understaffing, this bill, if it were law, would only further erode parks' ability to meet their mission. These funding levels are unsustainable, so what Congress needs to do is pass a budget deal that allows for more realistic numbers."

Jonathan Asher, the Wilderness Society's senior representative for government relations, said the bill "recycles a broad swath of tired policy riders that have no place in annual funding bills, particularly given Republicans' control over all three branches of government. These riders prohibit a safety net for sage grouse and reverse gains enacted to make our land planning system less inefficient and conflict-ridden."

Asher said that while the cut to LWCF prevents the "complete gutting of one of our country's most important conservation programs called for in the president's budget," it "still falls well short of providing what our national parks, recreation industry and local communities need."

<http://bit.ly/2ve7LGK>

2. Idle permit total tops 'record high' amid streamlining push

Pamela King, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

As the Bureau of Land Management's backlog of outstanding applications to drill on public lands shrinks, the number of tracts that have been approved for development but have gone unused is on the rise.

Under the new administration, Interior Department officials have highlighted the pileup of pending applications for permit to drill (APDs) as a top priority (*Energywire*, May 17). Last week, Secretary Ryan Zinke signed an order instructing his agency to start identifying solutions to address the logjam — which stood at 2,955 unprocessed applications as of April 30 (*Energywire*, July 7). Democrats on Capitol Hill have said those tallies pale in comparison to the number of permits BLM has approved but that remain idle — 7,532 as of fiscal 2015, according to the latest available data from the bureau.

In a June 29 appearance before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, a senior Interior official upped that count.

"It's correct that we have 7,950 APDs approved but not yet drilled this year," said Katharine MacGregor, Interior's deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management, in an exchange with Rep. Alan Lowenthal (D-Calif.), the subcommittee's ranking member.

The California congressman and his colleagues are still awaiting a formal fulfillment of their data request.

"Will you please ask [Secretary Zinke] to call me or [committee ranking member Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.)] with the 2016 data?" Lowenthal asked MacGregor. "Or you could call me with that data. Or you could text it."

MacGregor's count surpasses what President Obama's BLM last year deemed "a record high" number of unused permits.

The latest APD backlog includes 830 fewer pending applications than in fiscal 2015, when 3,785 APDs had yet to be processed, according to BLM. The backlog is a fluid number that fluctuates as the bureau receives new applications while it completes old ones, and as companies deprioritize certain projects for which they have already submitted APD packages.

Over roughly the same time period, the number of idle permits increased by 418.

Obtaining those data has been a critical element in Democrats' efforts to demonstrate that there is no pressing need to address the accumulation of APDs.

"It is not clear that there is a significant backlog of unprocessed APDs; in fact, the BLM's own data indicate that there is a glut of drilling permits that the oil and gas industry cannot act on fast enough," Grijalva wrote in an April 12 letter to Mike Nedd, BLM's acting director.

The surplus of unused permits could grow under the Trump administration's oversight, said Nada Culver, senior counsel and director of the Wilderness Society's BLM Action Center.

"This imbalance is going to continue and possibly set new records if we put more people on APD processing and don't put more scrutiny on who's requesting a permit and how they intend to use it," she said.

Until industry has more certainty as to how the federal government will regulate its operations on public lands, companies will continue to claim permits they may not be ready to use, said Kathleen Sgamma, president of the Western Energy Alliance.

"It's the perennial problem," she said. "Companies have no certainty on how long their permit is going to take. They need to request and have in hand more permits than they would if they just needed a state permit."

If an oil firm asked for 10 permits, drilled a couple of wells and then determined the land was not economic, the company is "not going to just turn in those permits because they paid \$9,500" for each one, Sgamma said.

The operator might hold on to the permits and wait for oil and gas prices to rebound, she said.

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

3. Senate Dems push back against Trump rule delays

Scott Streater, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

This story was updated at 9:50 a.m.

A coalition of 27 senators, all Democrats, are asking President Trump to "fully implement" two Obama-era rules designed to cut methane emissions from oil and natural gas drilling operations.

The senators, led by Sen. Tom Udall of New Mexico and Energy and Natural Resources ranking member Maria Cantwell of Washington, say in a letter that delaying implementation of the two rules by U.S. EPA and the Bureau of Land Management is "unwarranted" and "will harm public health, taxpayers, and our energy security."

"Suspending commonsense regulations to reduce waste and stop air pollution needlessly poses health and safety risks on children and our most vulnerable citizens," the senators wrote in the [letter](#).

"The BLM and EPA rules each rely on proven, widely available, and cost effective technologies to reduce leaking, venting, and flaring, and keep natural gas in production and in commerce rather than in the air. Delaying or revising these rules will only cause additional and unnecessary waste and result in substantial harm to communities across the country that will be exposed to dangerous air pollution," they added. "For the EPA to take action that will result in children being exposed to harmful oil and gas well emissions for at least two additional years in order to give the oil and gas industry a windfall is antithetical to the agency's core mission."

The letter comes as the Trump administration has proposed a two-year stay, on top of a separate 90-day administrative stay, on implementing portions of EPA's methane rule while the agency re-evaluates it ([Energywire](#), June 14). A federal appeals court last week ruled EPA did not have the authority to issue the 90-day stay ([Greenwire](#), July 3).

The Interior Department has also postponed implementation of a separate rule curbing methane emissions from energy operations on federal lands. BLM is reviewing revisions to the rule after the Senate in May narrowly voted against overturning it under the Congressional Review Act.

New Mexico and California last week filed a lawsuit challenging the delay of the BLM rule. And this week, environmental and tribal citizen groups filed a similar lawsuit ([Energywire](#), July 11).

"Both the EPA and BLM rules are commonsense, cost effective requirements that direct the oil and gas industry to find and fix leaks, use up-to-date readily available equipment, and prevent waste of a natural resource — saving taxpayers money while also reducing air pollution and protecting human health," the senators wrote.

They concluded, "We urge you to fully implement the EPA and BLM methane and air pollution regulations as legally required without delay and to keep these important protections for public health, American taxpayers, and our energy security in place."

<http://bit.ly/2uR8Zlr>

4. Zinke adds 7 staffers to department team

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke is getting some much-needed reinforcements this week, with the addition of staffers in some key areas.

The newly added appointees will fill slots in areas including water and science, the solicitor's office, and department communications.



Andrea Travnicek. Travnicek/LinkedIn

"We are building a team of qualified individuals from across the country to help carry out the work of the American people at the Department," Zinke said in a statement today. "I welcome each of them and I am so excited for us to work together to make the Department operate at the highest possible level to achieve our core mission."

For deputy assistant secretary for water and science, the administration has tapped Andrea Travnicek. She holds a doctorate in natural resources management/communication and has "negotiated on water issues at the state, federal, international, and tribal level," according to Interior.

Travnicek previously worked as a senior policy adviser for two North Dakota governors and has "experience working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, an environmental consulting firm in Bismarck, North Dakota, and Ducks Unlimited," the department said.



Heather Swift. Swift/LinkedIn

As counselor to the solicitor, the administration selected attorney Gary Lawkowski. The graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law previously served as counsel to Chairman Lee Goodman and Vice Chairman Donald McGahn at the Federal Election Commission.

For the communications office, the Interior Department named New York University graduate and former Trump campaign press aide Eli Nachmany as a writer and former Trump White House press aide Alex Hinson as deputy press secretary. Former Zinke congressional assistant Heather Swift is serving as press secretary. Swift served on the Interior beachhead team and held various communications positions at public affairs firms and U.S. Senate races.

Former Heritage Foundation employee Elinor Renner, who managed the group's internship program, was named special assistant to Zinke, and veteran advance man Luke Bullock was named advance representative to the secretary.

<http://bit.ly/2ujOuY6>

5. Chaos or conspiracy? Key posts vacant as nominations lag

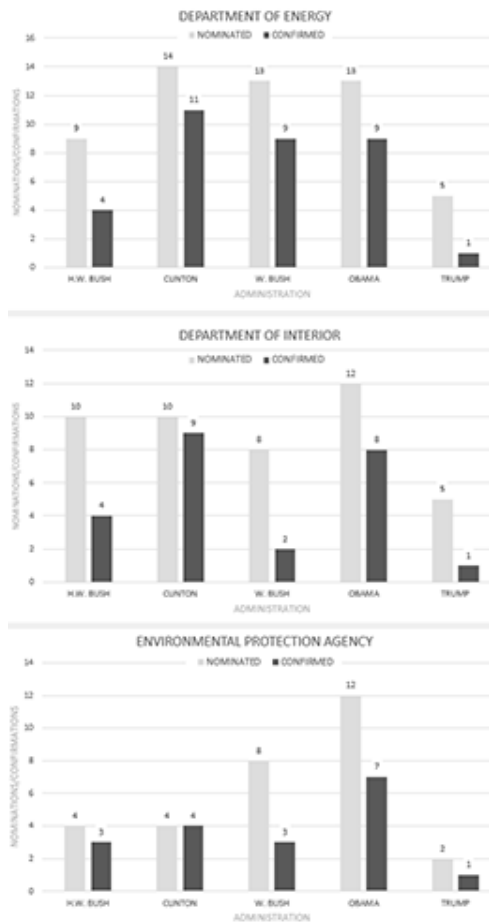
Hannah Northey, E&E News reporter Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

President Trump blasted Democrats on Twitter this week for blocking his nominees, but he's about six weeks off the pace set by his predecessors for picking people to fill more than 1,200 jobs that need Senate confirmation.

"The Trump administration is way behind. They're way off the path of other administrations," said Terry Sullivan, a political scientist at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and executive director of the nonpartisan White House Transition Project. "The Trump administration is below the performance of every president since Reagan in terms of not just getting people confirmed, but in terms of nominating people."

To be sure, the Senate is taking longer to confirm Trump nominees. The Partnership for Public Service says the Senate took an average of 44 days to confirm Trump's picks, breaking the previous record, 37 days for President Obama's nominees.

But Max Stier, the nonpartisan partnership's president and CEO, said the big problem is the White House, not the Senate. Nominees, he said, are relatively scarce.



[+] As political finger pointing rages on Capitol Hill, President Trump has yet to nominate scores of nominees to critical energy and environmental posts. Data: Partnership for Public Service/Raw data via Congress.gov

Of the 564 positions **tracked** by *The Washington Post* and the partnership, 374 have no nominees. At the departments of Energy and the Interior and U.S. EPA, only the agency heads have been confirmed, leaving scores of offices in the hands of acting officials.

The vacancies have lawmakers and White House officials pointing fingers at each other.

Republicans and the White House accused Senate Democrats this week of using procedural tactics — requiring cloture votes and boycotting confirmation hearings — to stall Trump's agenda.

Marc Short, the White House legislative director, said Monday that Democrats were sitting on 32 nominees waiting for a floor vote, calling it the "slowest confirmation process in American history." He complained the upper chamber has approved only 50 Trump nominees, compared with 202 officials at the same point in the Obama administration.

Democrats shot back that Republicans hold the majority in the upper chamber and can move the president's picks through committee to the floor for a vote. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) yesterday even challenged his Republican counterparts to bring nominees up for a vote this week, saying "they will get approved."

"This president has nominated fewer nominees than anyone else, and ... many more were brought here to the Senate without the necessary documentation, the paperwork, the ethics reports, the FBI reports," he said.

Said Stier, "The reality is there's blame to go around, but the large bulk of the issue has been the slowness of his nominations. You're not seeing a markedly different amount of time for the Senate to address these; what you are seeing is a much slower pace of nominations by the president."

Even key Senate Republicans have complained about delays in getting paperwork needed to complete a nomination and get a committee hearing and vote.

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) has several times lamented a lag in getting nominees' information from the White House for nominees for posts at DOE and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. It's unclear, she said in early May, why the White House has taken so long to move on nominees.

"All I know is names go into a dark hole and it just seems to take forever," she said (*E&E Daily*, May 3).

'They're behind on everything'

Vacancies across the government could create operational — and not just political — headaches for the Trump administration if more nominations aren't made and vetted, Stier warned.

The Federal Vacancies Reform Act bars acting officials from serving in a Senate-confirmed position for more than 240 days without having a nominee before the upper chamber, he said.

"You wouldn't want an administration to be able to do an end-run around the confirmation process by simply bringing in the person that they want and putting them in an acting role," Stier said.

If Trump fails to announce additional agency picks by September, the responsibilities for vacant offices would fall on Cabinet secretaries.

"If there's no nominee at that point, then all the responsibilities of that position roll up to the secretary, and the secretary has to do all those things that were dispersed across a larger field of leaders," Stier said.

"It'll further slow things down. These are huge organizations, and those jobs are already on the verge of being undoable."

Having critical offices overseen by acting officials is already putting a kink in operations and threatens to slow Trump's wide-ranging plans to whittle down EPA and DOE.

But despite talk in Washington about Trump slow-walking nominations being part of a strategy to pare down the government and starve some agencies, UNC's Sullivan said he sees no evidence of that.

"They are not ahead on the agencies they care about and behind on the agencies they don't care about," he said. "They're behind on everything. It's not a reflection of a strategy."

What's behind the administration's sluggish start? Sullivan pointed to a "perfect storm": a chaotic transition after Trump's surprise election win, a slow start on lining up nominees, relatively inexperienced staffers, an inefficient process for vetting job candidates and a laser focus among Trump officials on loyalty to the president.

He pointed to John DeStefano, Trump's official headhunter and director of presidential personnel, who jumped to the White House fresh from his job providing political data to conservative groups and congressional stints.

DeStefano served as political director to former House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) and was deputy executive director of the National Republican Congressional Committee.

"It's the first time he's done anything like this," Sullivan said. "He came from the House, a staffer trying to do a good job, but he's not familiar with it. And they didn't start early enough focusing on this."

'Problematic' hires?

And then things slow down when nominees hit the Senate, which has a crowded legislative calendar.

"The longer you wait, the longer it takes," Sullivan said. "It's a pattern across all administrations that if you don't put people forward early, they get caught up in the policy agenda in the Senate.

"It has nothing to do with politics or partisanship, it has to do with process and capacity in the Senate."

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said yesterday the Senate would shrink its August recess to turn to "the backlog of critical nominations that have been mindlessly stalled by Democrats" after lawmakers complete work on the enormously complicated health care legislation and a defense spending bill.

As the Senate grinds on, Trump's political hires who are at work in the agencies have been getting some unwelcome attention.

DOE, for example, has faced pushback on and off Capitol Hill and even fired a Trump political appointee after inflammatory tweets and op-eds surfaced (*E&E News PM*, July 7).

Stier said many political hires across the government were hastily pulled from Trump's so-called agency beachhead and landing teams.

"They were thrown together very quickly at the last minute, and I don't think there was deep vetting," he said. "As a result, I think you're finding there are a number of people who are problematic."

But Tom Pyle, president of the American Energy Alliance, who oversaw Trump's transition for DOE, said the process was not overly rushed and members of the landing team were thoroughly vetted. Pyle said a fair number of people who served on the Trump campaign expressed interest in serving the president when he assumed office and, like other administrations, came aboard but either found it wasn't a good fit or lost interest.

"It's very typical, not abnormal," Pyle said.

DOE vacancies

- General counsel (David Jonas, not yet confirmed)
- Chief financial officer (no nominee)
- Undersecretary for energy (Mark Wesley Menezes, not yet confirmed)
- Undersecretary for management and performance (no nominee)
- Undersecretary for nuclear security/administrator for nuclear security (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary for congressional and intergovernmental affairs (no nominee)
- Inspector general (no nominee)
- Undersecretary for science (Paul Dabbar, not yet confirmed)
- Assistant secretary for electricity delivery and energy reliability (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary for energy efficiency and renewable energy (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary for environmental management (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary for fossil energy (no nominee)

- Assistant secretary for nuclear energy (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary for international affairs (no nominee)
- Administrator, U.S. Energy Information Administration (no nominee)
- Director, energy advanced research projects department (no nominee)
- Director, Office of Economic Impact and Diversity (no nominee)
- Director, Office of Science (no nominee)
- Deputy administrator for defense programs, National Nuclear Security Administration (no nominee)
- Deputy administrator for defense nuclear nonproliferation (no nominee)
- Principal deputy administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration (no nominee)
- **EPA vacancies**
- Deputy administrator (no nominee)
- General counsel (no nominee)
- Chief financial officer (no nominee)
- Assistant administrator for water (no nominee)
- Assistant administrator for administration and resources management (no nominee)
- Assistant administrator for air and radiation (no nominee)
- Assistant administrator for chemical safety and pollution prevention (no nominee)
- Assistant administrator for enforcement and compliance assurance (Susan Bodine, not yet confirmed)
- Assistant administrator for environmental information (no nominee)
- Assistant administrator for international and tribal affairs (no nominee)
- Assistant administrator for research and development (no nominee)
- Assistant administrator for solid waste and emergency response (no nominee)
- **Interior vacancies**
- Deputy secretary (David Bernhardt, not yet confirmed)
- Solicitor (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary for policy, management and budget (Susan Combs, not yet confirmed)
- Inspector general (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary of Indian affairs (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary for insular areas (Doug Domenech, not yet confirmed)
- Assistant secretary for fish, wildlife and parks (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary for land and minerals management (no nominee)
- Assistant secretary for water and science (no nominee)
- Director, Bureau of Land Management (no nominee)
- Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation (Brenda Burman, not yet confirmed)
- Director, National Park Service (no nominee)
- Director, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (no nominee)
- Director, Fish and Wildlife Service (no nominee)
- Director, U.S. Geological Survey (no nominee)
- Special trustee for American Indians (no nominee)

<http://bit.ly/2tNmhp7>

6. States meet with Zinke panel on changes to federal plans

Scott Streater, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

Members of a panel established by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review the Obama administration's sweeping greater sage grouse conservation plans are meeting this week in Denver with Western state leaders to gather feedback about the plans and how they should be revised, sources said.

The meetings today and tomorrow are closed to the public and are intended for the members of the review panel that Zinke ordered last month to get input from the states.

The meetings are being conducted by the federal-state sage grouse task force led by Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead (R) and Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper (D) that helped the Obama administration finalize the federal plans in September 2015. The federal plans amended 98 Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service land-use plans to include sage grouse conservation measures covering nearly 70 million acres in 10 Western states.

The plans helped convince the Fish and Wildlife Service not to list the greater sage grouse for protection under the Endangered Species Act but have been criticized by some states and other stakeholders as too rigid and restrictive.

Staff members from most of the 10 states covered by the plans are attending the meetings this week with members of the federal sage grouse review panel, sources said.

That includes John Swartout, a Republican who is a senior adviser to Hickenlooper and a member of the federal-state sage grouse task force.

GOP Western governors have mostly cheered Zinke's Secretarial Order 3353, mandating an internal review of Obama-era regulations aimed at conserving the mottled-brown bird ([Greenwire](#), June 8).

States have argued that the federal plans infringe on or hamper separate, state-developed sage grouse conservation plans.

The Interior Department is "not going to ask the states to redo their plans but certainly give them the option to incorporate more variables if we deem that appropriate," Zinke said last month in announcing the review of the federal sage grouse plans ([Greenwire](#), June 7).

It's not clear what specific changes the states will recommend. But state officials have said they want to see changes that allow more "flexibility" in how the plans are implemented ([Greenwire](#), Feb. 23).

In Utah, which has filed a federal lawsuit challenging the federal plans, state officials have said they want more time for its grouse management strategy to work before the federal plans are fully implemented.

In Wyoming, which is home to nearly half the remaining sage grouse, state officials have said the federal blueprint includes some significant differences from the state plan, including the type of mitigation requirements when disturbances do take place inside state-designated sage grouse core areas.

For projects in portions of Wyoming where there's a checkerboard pattern of federal and state ownership, mitigation requirements can be different on parcels sitting side by side, and officials want to see that changed.

And in Colorado, Swartout and others have said they want to see changes allowing oil and gas development in some cases closer to sage grouse breeding grounds, called leks, than what is allowed in the federal plans.

Swartout could not be reached for comment on this story in time for publication.

But he told E&E News in February that the federal strategy the state worked out with BLM Colorado officials included a tiered-system approach to leasing near leks, where development is allowed as long as certain conditions were met for projects 3 miles from a lek, with different criteria for projects 2 miles away and 1 mile away.

But when the draft plans were sent to BLM headquarters in Washington, Swartout said, the tiered system was removed.

"We look forward to having a dialogue with the new people," he said, referring to Zinke.

The federal sage grouse review panel is, among other things, exploring whether the plans hamper energy development on federal lands.

The members of the review panel, which is made up mostly of representatives with BLM, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey, will identify plan provisions that may need to be adjusted or rescinded based on potential energy extraction and other development on public lands.

The federal grouse review panel must submit recommendations to Zinke by Aug. 6.

<http://bit.ly/2vdz8R2>

7. Former lobbyist and Hill staffer nabs prime post

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

The Trump administration has named former lobbyist and congressional staffer Todd Willens to serve as an assistant deputy secretary in the Interior Department.

"Todd Willens is an exceptionally qualified natural resources professional," Interior spokeswoman Heather Swift said today. "His Western roots and decades of experience working with sportsmen, tribal and local governments, and the congressional delegations will be an incredible asset to the department and the American people moving forward."



Todd Willens. Willens/LinkedIn

Willens' new appointment, which he noted in his LinkedIn profile and was first reported by the *Miami Herald*, marks a return to the department in which he served during the George W. Bush administration.

Willens will be working closely with the department's deputy secretary, David Bernhardt, who is still awaiting Senate confirmation.

For the last seven years, Willens has served as chief of staff for Rep. Steve Pearce (R-N.M.). Before joining Pearce's staff in 2010, the Northern California native and UCLA graduate worked for several lobbying firms, including Washington Strategies LLC and Vitello Consulting.

His lobbying firms' clients ranged from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and Zoological Association of America to the North Central Montana Regional Water Authority, in Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's home state, according to filings with the Secretary of the Senate's office.

Willens also volunteered to serve on the joint congressional committee organizing President Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration, for which he was "assigned to a specific seating area to assist elected officials, dignitaries, performers, and other guests," according to his LinkedIn profile.

Previously, Willens served as legislative director for former Rep. Richard Pombo, a California Republican and staunch critic of the Endangered Species Act. Pombo also tapped Willens for the post of senior policy director of the House Natural Resources Committee, during the time Pombo was leading committee efforts to revise the ESA in the late 1990s.

Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson of Florida criticized Willens' appointment, telling the *Herald* that Willens showed a "disregard for the importance of the Everglades" when he previously worked as a deputy assistant Interior secretary from 2006 to 2008.

<http://bit.ly/2sR6t3D>

8. Think tank wrote Utah Bears Ears bill; Republican bashed Zinke

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

New documents obtained by a Montana-based government watchdog show that a conservative think tank is the primary author of a Utah legislative resolution earlier this year calling for the elimination of the Bears Ears National Monument.

The Western Values Project provided emails to E&E News obtained under state open records laws that show the Sutherland Institute wrote the resolution approved by state lawmakers in January that urged President Trump to rescind the 1.35-million-acre monument (*Greenwire*, Feb. 1).

Both Utah state Rep. Ken Ivory (R) and the Sutherland Institute acknowledged that the resolution was produced by the think tank but said the practice is commonplace in the Beehive State.

"That's not unusual," Ivory said. "We get help from a variety of groups and organizations on legislation frequently. That's how legislation is crafted and created."

Ivory added that the Sutherland Institute drafted the resolution based on prior conversations and then submitted the document to state legislative staff.

"There were a lot of other groups that had input: Farm Bureau, Association of Counties," Ivory said. "Particularly on issues that affect 1.35 million acres, that lock of 109,000 acres of school trust lands, that seize 14,000 acres of private land, there were a number of people very interested that we reached out to and that would have had input in the process."

According to the documents provide by the Western Values Project, Ivory directed state aides tasked with writing legislation to contact Sutherland Policy Analyst Matt Anderson "for language" on the resolution.

"I'm drafting your resolution regarding Bears Ears, except I still haven't received the draft language from Matt Anderson," Utah State Legislature Policy Analyst Megan Bolin wrote to Ivory in late-January. "I contacted Matt on the 12th and he said he was working on the language and would get it to me soon. I'll try to contact Matt again, and I can come meet you as well, if needed. Let me know."

The Sutherland Institute, which is headed by Boyd Matheson, former chief of staff to Utah Sen. Mike Lee (R), noted that Utah lawmakers "regularly reach out" to the group for its expertise.

"Experts at organizations advocating for economic policies, environmental policies, tax policies or civil rights policies are asked each year to submit language to be considered by legislative attorneys as they draft legislation, on any number of bills covering any number of topics," Stan Rasmussen, vice president of policy and operations at Sutherland, said in a statement provided to E&E News. "It is fairly common practice not only in Utah, but in many other states in which legislators have full-time jobs outside of their legislative duties."

Last month, the Sutherland Institute organized a letter signed by 28 organizations, including the American Energy Alliance and the American Lands Council, that praised Trump's review of national monuments, including the Bears Ears site.

The letter also criticized the Antiquities Act of 1906, which allows presidents to designate public lands as monuments to protect areas of cultural, historic or scientific interest, as an "executive bludgeon" (*Greenwire*, June 7).

Zinke a 'very bad pick'

In the meantime, Ivory, an outspoken proponent of turning over federal lands to their respective states, remained neutral over Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's ongoing review of dozens of national monuments for potential reductions or even elimination.

"A review is certainly appropriate," Ivory said, but later added: "The deeper question is, what is the limit of federal authority in land-use withdrawal designations within a state? ... To that point, it doesn't go nearly far enough."

In a December email exchange with Utah Farm Bureau Vice President of National Government Affairs Randy Parker, Ivory offered a harsher take on Zinke generally, criticizing the then-Montana lawmaker's nomination to the Trump administration.

"He is against local control of lands and waffles persistently. Very bad pick!" Ivory wrote.

Asked for his current opinion of the Interior secretary, Ivory offered a more measured take.

"Some of the things he's doing are good, but the real question is fundamentally jurisdictional: Where should the decisions on Utah lands be made?" Ivory said. "Until we get to those fundamental issues, those principal issues, that's really at the heart of the issues for the care of the environment for preserving access and for a healthier economy."

Western Values Project Executive Director Chris Saeger said the emails obtained from his organization's open records request show leading figures in Utah's Legislature critical of the Trump administration.

"We're still going through this, but the general impression we got is these are a group of politicians who are asking an administration they don't think very highly of to do favors just because it's convenient," Saeger said. "It calls into question the sincerity of their motives."

He pointed to messages from state Sen. Wayne Niederhauser (R), who co-sponsored the Bears Ears resolution, criticizing Trump for his use of executive orders.

"The issue of Bears Ears National Monument, and the public lands debate generally, is related to the larger problem of Federalism," Niederhauser wrote to a constituent in mid-February. "Although the Antiquities Act might be legal, is it wise? I do not believe that one single person, even the President, should have the power to

unilaterally make such a decision. It should be made in Congress, where it was constitutionally delegated by the Founding Fathers."

He added: "On that note, I do not agree with the actions taken by President Trump by executive order in the same way that I didn't support them from President Obama. I am opposed to executive orders of any kind."

<http://bit.ly/2vdiTU8>

9. House passes anti-discrimination, land bills

Cecelia Smith Schoenwalder, E&E News reporter

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The House yesterday passed legislation by voice vote to strengthen anti-discrimination laws for federal government workers.

H.R. 702, from Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), would require agencies to establish a system to track equal employment opportunity complaints from beginning to end. The system would track any resulting disciplinary action.

The Cummings bill would also block agencies from using nondisclosure agreements to restrict federal employees from reporting waste, fraud and abuse to Congress.

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.) brought up the handling of sexual harassment allegations by the National Park Service and Department of Agriculture, including the Forest Service.

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee held a hearing last Congress to hear from current and former USDA employees about the handling of sexual harassment accusations and investigations (*E&E Daily*, Dec. 2, 2016).

"It is clear that the deficiencies in those programs are long-standing and have hurt numerous employees," Connolly said during debate.

The House also passed:

- **H.R. 954**, from Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), to remove restrictions on certain land transferred to Rockingham County, Va. It passed by voice vote.
- **H.R. 1397**, from Rep. Barbara Comstock (R-Va.), to transfer federal land along the George Washington Memorial Parkway. It passed 406-0.
- **H.R. 1404**, from Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.), to convey land owned by the U.S. to the Tucson Unified School District and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe of Arizona. It passed by voice vote.
- **H.R. 1541**, from Rep. Lynn Jenkins (R-Kan.), to authorize the Interior secretary to acquire certain property related to the Fort Scott National Historic Site. It passed by voice vote.
- **H.R. 1719**, from Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (D-Calif.), to authorize the Interior secretary to acquire about 44 acres of land in Martinez, Calif. It passed 401-15.
- **H.R. 1913**, from Rep. Jimmy Panetta (D-Calif.), to establish the Clear Creek National Recreation Area in California's San Benito and Fresno counties, and to designate the Joaquin Rocks Wilderness in those counties. It passed by voice vote.
- **H.R. 1306**, from Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), to convey certain federal land in Oregon. It passed by voice vote.

- **H.R. 2156**, from Rep. Steve Knight (R-Calif.), to establish a national memorial and national monument to commemorate those killed by the collapse of the St. Francis Dam in 1928. It passed by voice vote.

<http://bit.ly/2t4gQoF>

10. Despite recess delay, Senate may punt on energy bill

Geof Koss and George Cahlink, E&E News reporters

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's decision to delay the start of the August recess may help clear some of the backlog of pending executive branch nominees but may not open the path for the bipartisan energy reform bill, Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski said yesterday.

The Alaska Republican has been angling to bring her bill revised from last year, **S. 1460**, to the floor this work period in between a possible debate over health care, nominations and other items.

Before McConnell shocked Capitol Hill at around noon yesterday by opting to delay recess, Murkowski said, "I am going to advocate that in these spaces that we have that we've got a bipartisan product that is ready to go and why wouldn't you want to take that up?"

But when McConnell pushed for action on a long list of unfinished legislative business, he mentioned the defense policy bill, the debt ceiling and nominations. Not energy.

At least, Murkowski said, the extended work session may help clear Trump administration picks under her jurisdiction, including two nominees for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, as well as Dan Brouillette to be deputy Energy secretary and David Bernhardt to be the No. 2 official at the Interior Department.

She said it was unclear whether there would be time to squeeze in debate on energy. "I don't know the answer to that," Murkowski said.

The chairwoman added she was "a little bit frustrated" following McConnell's decision. The usefulness of delaying recess remains to be seen.

"It's one thing to say, 'Hey gang, let's work to make sure that we're finished up these initiatives and we're going to stay here until it's done,'" she told reporters. "That gives us sort of a plan or outline going forward, but instead what we got is 'Sorry, nobody's going home for the first two weeks'" of recess.

There's likely to be competition from other committees in processing nominations and taking up legislation. Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.), a political ally of U.S. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, said he hoped the extra time would allow the Senate to move on stalled EPA picks.

Inhofe, former chairman of the Environment and Public Works panel, said he had recently spoken with Pruitt about his frustration about not yet having any other Senate-confirmed posts filled at the agency.

"He is still not over the fact that Washington does not move like Oklahoma moves," said Inhofe.



Several Senate Republicans called on leaders to work through at least part of the planned August recess. C-SPAN

Before McConnell's announcement, Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), one of 10 junior senators who lobbied for extending the session, said he believes the chamber will have more time for meaningful action, including "unleashing" American energy independence and pushing a major infrastructure package.

"You get the sense when you talk about August recess or any other element of recess it's some sort of sacred issue you can't touch. I think what should be more sacred is getting things done," Sullivan said.

House Ways and Means Chairman Kevin Brady (R-Texas) told reporters yesterday he would defer to Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) on scheduling matters but said he preferred to be home with constituents.

"My view is August is an important month to connect with our voters on tax reform," he said.

A House leadership aide last night indicated the House was sticking to its scheduled July 28 departure date.

Murkowski echoed Brady's sentiment. "When we go back home, this is not a recess like you and I used to have when we were little kids," she said. "This is certainly where I do my hardest and best work."

Reporter Kellie Lunney contributed.

<http://bit.ly/2sQvN9W>

11. Coal got knocked out in Calif. Now, gas is on the ropes

Debra Kahn, E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

A wave of regulatory reconsiderations of natural gas-fired power plants in California has renewables advocates cheering.

The state's grid operator is expected to release a study next month on whether the Puente Power Project, a gas-fired plant planned for the Southern California coast 60 miles west of Los Angeles, might be supplanted by solar panels, energy storage or demand response.

The California Public Utilities Commission approved Southern California Edison's contract with NRG Energy Inc. to build the 262-megawatt plant in June 2016 as a replacement for a larger plant on the same site. The

Puente plant fit into the state's goal to boost renewables to 50 percent; as a fast-ramping facility, it could smooth out intermittent wind and solar power, which has a tendency to produce choppy resources.

Now, as politicians are considering moving to 100 percent "zero-carbon" resources by 2045 — as a bill being considered this week in the state Legislature would do — regulators are tapping the brakes on Puente and a number of other gas-fired plants planned for the Southern California region.

Since the state has no coal-fired plants and is already planning on shutting down its remaining nuclear plant, natural gas is the next resource in line to be phased out in favor of renewables.

"In general, it's going to be renewables in, gas out, so you've got that sort of long, slow good-night of lots of gas," said Jim Caldwell, a senior technical consultant with the Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies, a Sacramento think tank that has been advocating for regulators to reconsider their grid policies to better account for renewables and climate change. "We think Puente is right at the tip of that spear. ... The gas industry and the gas generation industry is facing a big problem, and they know it."

The California Independent System Operator's study, due out Aug. 16, will go to the California Energy Commission, which will make the final decision on whether to permit Puente.

The study will analyze how much capacity is needed in the Moorpark area of Ventura County, where roughly 2,000 MW is due to retire by 2020. Scenarios will include replacing Puente with varying amounts of demand response, energy efficiency, solar power and storage.

NRG officials said they welcomed the study but defended the plant. "We feel it's the right project in the right place at the right time," said NRG spokesman David Knox. The plant's 20-year power purchase agreement with Edison "aligns well with the transition California is looking at to go to greater and greater renewables," he said.

In a statement, Edison said it "supports all of the projects that it competitively awarded in 2014 and which have since been approved by the CPUC. The Puente project was competitively selected, in addition to energy efficiency and distributed generation projects."

The head of a trade group representing independent generators in California faulted CAISO's process of announcing the study after the CPUC had already approved the contract. "We have a procurement process that's worked very well in California," said Jan Smutny-Jones, CEO of the Independent Energy Producers Association. "At the eleventh hour, coming up with issues — really, what's going on is the people who are advocating for something different are representing people who want to do demand response, rather than the power plant."

Another factor contributing to the wave of reconsiderations is that many gas-fired plants in California are facing imminent deadlines to stop using "once-through" cooling systems that harm marine life. Those deadlines offer regulators a chance to consider alternatives to repowering or replacement.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power announced last month that it would put all plans to repower its once-through cooled units on hold and perform a study of alternatives, to be completed by early next year. The study will cover 10 gas-fired units at three plants that were scheduled for replacement from 2021 to 2029. Alternatives could include repowering them at a reduced level; improving transmission lines only; or replacing them with distributed energy resources, including energy efficiency, solar power, energy storage, demand response and electric vehicle charging.

CAISO has already started considering a future with less gas than planned. In March, it issued a study examining a 50 percent renewable portfolio standard plus the early retirement of up to 9,658 MW of gas-fired power statewide, and found several potential local reliability issues that could be solved by demand response

or transmission upgrades. Issues with not having enough quick-ramping capacity, particularly in the early evening after sunset, emerged between 4,000 and 6,000 MW of retirement.

Caldwell said he thought California could achieve concentrations of up to 75 percent renewables using today's technology and resources. "I believe fundamental market redesign will be required to go past 75 percent, and we have not started the process of figuring out how to transition there," he said.

Smutny-Jones conceded that California has created a limited role for gas. "To the extent you'll see any gas plants being built in California, they will be built for localized need, not system need," he said. "There may be pockets where you do need something that will actually generate electrons. If batteries and demand response show up, the plant won't run very much. It's an insurance policy to keep the lights on in that area."

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

12. House approps rider blocks ESA protection for gray wolves

[Jennifer Yachnin](#), E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

A rider tucked into a House spending bill released yesterday would bar the Interior Department from issuing federal protections for gray wolves across the continental United States.

The House Interior, Environmental and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee's fiscal 2018 spending bill would prohibit Interior from treating the gray wolf "as an endangered species or threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973."

The language is the latest congressional attempt to bar protections for the gray wolf. Senate lawmakers introduced a sportsman's bill earlier this month that would likewise prohibit the Fish and Wildlife Service from listing the gray wolves as endangered across the Great Lakes region and in Wyoming ([Greenwire](#), July 3). Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson (R) introduced a similar stand-alone bill in January ([E&E Daily](#), Jan. 18).

The House budget proposal comes in the wake of a March ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to reverse a lower court's ruling that restored protection for the wolves. The appellate court upheld FWS's initial 2012 determination to delist the animals in Wyoming.

FWS also opted to delist the gray wolves in the western Great Lakes, but that decision has been challenged by the Humane Society of the United States.

Defenders of Wildlife President and CEO Jamie Rappaport Clark criticized the House proposal as a "dirty budget," pointing to a 17 percent budget cut for new species listings under the ESA.

"This wolf rider means certain death for America's wolves," Clark added. "It forces the Department of the Interior to abdicate its responsibilities for protecting gray wolves, which are currently listed as endangered in much of the contiguous United States. It also disrupts the abilities of other federal agencies to comply with their obligations under the law. It is particularly egregious that this rider would halt all efforts to protect and recover the Mexican gray wolf — the most endangered gray wolf in the world with just 113 in the U.S. and 35 in Mexico."

<http://bit.ly/2t3QUJV>

13. Wilderness Society hires firm with Trump ties

[Nick Bowlin](#), E&E News reporter

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

The Wilderness Society has signed with a top law and lobbying shop run by one of President Trump's personal attorneys.

The environmental advocacy group, a critic of some of the administration's public land policies, is working with two lobbyists with the firm Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP: Clarine Nardi Riddle and Justin Rubin.



Justin Rubin. Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP

Riddle and Rubin will focus on "[c]onservation of natural resources/budget," according to lobbying disclosure documents filed on July 7.

Marc Kasowitz, the firm's founding partner and long-time New York financial lawyer, leads the president's personal legal team and has represented him for decades.

The Wilderness Society has been a prominent opponent of the Interior Department's review of national monuments and has fought language in the fiscal 2018 budget resolution to allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (*E&E News PM*, July 10).

The group is also interested in sage grouse protection. It sued the Bureau of Land Management this spring, challenging oil and natural gas leases in Utah, claiming that the leases would harm the bird's habitat.

The group said in a statement today: "Public lands face dire threats under this administration and Congress. Everything we do is part of our effort to meet this unprecedented threat and make sure that our lands and waters are protected, not sold out to the highest bidder."



Clarine Nardi Riddle. Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP

Riddle has deep ties to Washington, D.C., circles. A former attorney general of Connecticut, she was chief of staff from 2003 to 2013 for former Sen. Joe Lieberman, a Democrat who turned independent in 2006.

Lieberman is a partner at the same firm. He cited its close ties to the president in withdrawing his name from the pool of possible FBI director nominees.

Rubin has worked in the Defense Department, where his portfolio included reform of military strategic planning processes, according to his firm bio.

Kasowitz Benson Torres has represented Trump numerous times over the years, in everything from divorce proceedings and casino bankruptcies to the Trump University litigation that concluded this spring in a \$25 million settlement. David Friedman, the president's pick as ambassador to Israel, was once a top partner.

The Wilderness Society spent \$190,000 on lobbying in the first quarter of 2017.

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

14. Price tag for senior lifetime passes to spike 700% in August

Published: Wednesday, July 12, 2017

The National Park Service has set Aug. 28 as the date for a rate hike in senior citizen lifetime passes.

Senior citizens who purchase a pass before that date can get it for \$10. After that date, the passes will increase to \$80 per person.

Reports that NPS would be raising prices for senior lifetime passes prompted many online applications, creating a backlog of between 20,000 and 80,000 applications, according to officials.

Tom Crosson, a spokesman for NPS, said the price increase was mandated by Congress.

Crosson said there is a "huge" rollout involved, including new cards, re-keying cash registers and educating the workforce (Erin Arvedlund, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 11). — CS

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