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INTERIOR DAILY COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

NEWS TO SHARE:

Morning Consult: House GOP Sees Smooth Sailing for Forest Management Bill

"House Republicans expect to pass a bipartisan bill tackling forest resilience on Wednesday, with further action likely in the Senate, as California's wildfires add urgency to finding a comprehensive solution. But many Democrats, and almost half of California's delegation in the House, support competing legislation, which has more than four times as many co-sponsors, that's focused solely on funding and doesn't try to roll back environmental regulations that limit logging. The bill introduced by Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) that's scheduled for a Wednesday floor vote would reduce the risk of wildfire by offering different options to the U.S. Forest Service to fund fire suppression, without changing funding levels, and by creating access for loggers to thin overgrown forests."

CORRECTING THE RECORD:

Huffington Post: Trump's 'Review' Of Utah Monument Was Over Before It Started

"For anyone following the Trump administration's months-long review of America's national monuments, Friday likely felt like the punchline to a joke they'd already heard. Six months after signing a pair of executive orders threatening the future of 27 national monuments, President Donald Trump reportedly phoned Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) to inform him that he would follow through on Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's recommendation to shrink Bears Ears National Monument, a 1.35 million-acre area in southern Utah that President Barack Obama declared a national monument in 2016. "I'm approving the Bears Ears recommendation for you, Orrin," Trump reportedly told the senator, according to The Washington Post. Hatch, who has called the monument a "travesty," said the call left him feeling "incredibly grateful." The site is named after a pair of buttes and is home to thousands of Native American archaeological and cultural sites. It has been at the center of the monuments controversy, and Trump requested an expedited, 45-day review. It remains unclear how many acres the administration plans to strip from the monument, although the state is reportedly pushing for a 90 percent reduction."

- **Secretary Zinke's statement:** "No President should use the authority under the Antiquities Act to restrict public access, prevent hunting and fishing, burden private land, or eliminate traditional land uses, unless such action is needed to protect the object. The recommendations I sent to the president on national monuments will maintain federal ownership of all federal land and protect the land under federal environmental regulations, and also provide a much-needed change for the local communities who border and rely on these lands for hunting and fishing, economic development, traditional uses, and recreation."

High Country News: Scandals pile up for Interior secretary

"In recent weeks, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has taken a lot of heat for his decisions."

Conservation groups have lambasted him over the secretiveness of his department's monuments review. The final review has yet to be made public, though a draft of the report leaked to the press in September. Conservationists have also critiqued his moves to undo years of collaborative planning for sage grouse protection. Amid all this, several events have come to light that raise questions about Zinke's ethical practices. The now-revoked Whitefish Energy contract for grid repair in Puerto Rico — though the tiny firm hails from his hometown, Zinke denies any involvement — is only the latest example. Some of his rumored transgressions have quickly dissipated; for example, he reportedly laughed off claims that he threatened Alaska senators Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan before a health care vote. He tweeted a photo of himself and Murkowski sharing beers a few days later. But some of the controversies — including allegations that Zinke has mixed professional and personal business, dodged campaign finance laws and generally demonstrated dubious ethics — have led watchdog groups to call for investigations."

- **DOI statement on travel:** "The Interior Department under the Trump Administration has always and will always continue to work to ensure all officials follow appropriate rules and regulations when traveling, including using government coach class fare options at all times appropriate and feasible, to ensure the efficient use of government resources."
- **Secretary Zinke's statement on Whitefish Energy:** "I had absolutely nothing to do with Whitefish Energy receiving a contract in Puerto Rico. Any attempts by the dishonest media or political operatives to tie me to awarding or influencing any contract involving Whitefish are completely baseless. Only in elitist Washington, D.C., would being from a small town be considered a crime. Neither myself nor anyone in my office has advocated for this company in any way. After the initial contract was awarded, I received a single email from the company, on which I took no action. All records, which are being made available, will prove no involvement. I welcome any and all investigations into these allegations, and encourage the Interior Department's Inspector General to investigate this matter fully."

OTHER TOP STORIES:

The Times-Picayune: Bill Cassidy balks at Trump administration's offshore oil revenue figure, seeks review

"Concerned that Louisiana is getting only half of the \$140 million it expected under the federal Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act, U.S. Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., has asked his staff to review the Trump administration's accounting of the money. He said aides are examining the 2006 law itself, revenue from offshore oil leases and how the Interior Department calculated the payout. "We're trying to do our own individual verification of those numbers," Cassidy said in an interview Friday (Oct. 27). "I'm not saying they're wrong. I'm not saying they're right." Cassidy's comments came a week after the state Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority learned Louisiana would receive only \$70 million under the act in the federal fiscal year that began Oct. 1. That will require scaling back coastal restoration and hurricane protection projects in fiscal 2019 or finding the money elsewhere, they said."

Connecticut Mirror: Tribes' lawyers tell Interior it must accept casino deal

"Two national law firms representing the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan tribal nations pressed the federal government Tuesday with a letter insisting the Interior secretary has no choice but to approve their gaming agreements with Connecticut and clear the way for them to jointly develop a commercial casino in East Windsor. The letter comes just days after a meeting at the Bureau of Indian Affairs within the Department of the Interior, where the tribes and the state's congressional delegation failed to move the department off its puzzling stance of neither rejecting nor approving amendments to the tribes' gaming compacts."

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Alex Hinson

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