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[DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS 12-22-17.docx](#)

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS – 12/22/17

Lori Mashburn, White House Liaison
Natalie Davis, Special Assistant to the Secretary

STATUS OF THE SECRETARY

NEXT WEEK:

- 12/22 CA Personal Day

NOTE: The Secretary will be away on personal travel 12/22-1/5.

STATUS OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

TODAY: The DepSec is in DC conducting internal meetings

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WH COMMS REPORT

- **N/A**

AGENCY MEDIA (submitted 12/21)

WEEK AHEAD December 20 thru December 28, 2017

Announcements/Releases/Events

U.S. Department of the Interior

Secretarial-level Announcements/Events/Interviews

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and USGS to provide an Updated Estimate of Conventional Oil and Gas Resources in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and adjacent lands and waters. Release has been shared.

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- **December 27: Local BLM Release:** The BLM-CA El Centro Field Office anticipates signing a Notice to Proceed for commercial operation of the Tule Wind Project. Avangrid Renewables has a power purchase agreement with Southern California Edison to supply up to 132 megawatts of energy for a 15- year contract period. The Tule Wind Project is located in the eastern portion of the County of San Diego and consists of 57 turbines, 52 of which are on BLM public lands and 5 on private property.
- **December TBD: Local BLM Release:** the BLM-UT Moab Field Office intends to initiate scoping for a programmatic environmental assessment analyzing potential impacts of issuing Special Recreation Permits (SRP) for non-mechanized commercial and organized group activities. The proposed action would include use of designated roads and trails, interpretive sites, and established viewpoints in the Moab Field Office. The purpose is to facilitate timely response to SRP requests and to protect resources while still providing desired visitor experiences.
- **December TBD: Local BLM Release:** The BLM-UT Monticello Field Office plans to initiate scoping on three recreation projects to improve facilities at Grand

Flats Campground and Shay Canyon and House on Fire Trailheads. The Shay Canyon Trailhead is in the Indian Creek Unit of the Bears Ears National Monument and the other two projects are in the Shash Jaa Unit. Visitation to the area has markedly increased in recent years.

Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement

- **December TBD: National BSEE Release:** BSEE will issue a press release highlighting the opening of the public comment period for the revised Production Safety Systems rule. The publication of the proposed rulemaking notice in the Federal Register marks the start of the 30-day comment period.

Land Buy Back Program

- **Jan. 3 (tent.): National LBBP Release:** The LBBP will issue a release on the 2017 Status Report to Indian Country and General national audience.

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CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE (updated 12/18)

UPCOMING SENR HEARING: The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Water and Power Subcommittee is set to hold an oversight hearing on the benefits of title transfer and opportunities to improve the process. Other topics include what types of projects and transfers should need to be approved by Congress; the process for getting transfer of a projects including the level of environmental compliance that is required; and why projects are pursuing transfers (ability to finance, lower project costs, approval delays, etc). DOI witness is pending.

Timing: January 10, 2017

Contact: Amanda Kaster, Advisor, Congressional Affairs

DOI NOMINEES IN PROGRESS: Susan Combs (A/S PMB) passed out of committee August 3, 2017 and still awaits a vote. Ryan Nelson (Solicitor) appeared before the SENR committee on September 7, 2017 and is waiting for a vote. Tim Petty's (Asst. Secretary, Water & Science Nominee) was nominated November 14, 2017 and his nomination hearing was held on 12/5/17. He also passed out of committee and is awaiting final confirmation. **HE WAS CONFIRMED ON 12/21/2017.** Each nominee has continued to make themselves available to Senators for meetings and follow up. DOI OCL is working with OGE and the White House to get final approval for Asst. Sec. Indian Affairs nominee, Tara Sweeney before submitting her paperwork to the Senate. The White House nominated Steve Gardner for OSM. His Senate questionnaire is currently under review.

Contact: John Tanner, Director, Congressional Affairs

POLITICAL APPOINTEE UPDATE (updated)

DOI politicals on board = 65

6 PAS confirmed as of 12/21/17

- **CONFIRMED: Tim Petty, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science**

5 nominated awaiting confirmation:

- **Required to re-nominate:** Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary Policy Management and Budget.
- **Required to re-nominate:** Ryan Douglas Nelson, Solicitor
- Pending Hearing: Tara Sweeney, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
- Pending Hearing: Steve Gardner, Director, Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation

Overall:

- Schedule C: 36 of 68 onboard; 2 starting; 6 in process
- NC-SES: 26 of 44 onboard; 3 starting; 1 in process
- PAS: 5 Confirmed; 5 Announced; 14 of 17 Submitted to PPO

SECRETARY SPEAKING INVITATIONS

Accepted:

1/22 Alaska Federation of Natives - Challenges at America's Northernmost Border
2/9 Western Hunting & Conservation Expo (Salt Lake City, Utah)
3/6-7 CERA Week (Houston, Texas)
Open (date TBC)- Americans for Tax Reform (DC)
Open (date TBC)- Detroit Economic Club

Outstanding Invitations in Process:

1/12-13 Montana Outfitters and Guides Association Winter Convention (Helena, MT)
1/13 Battle of Cowpens 237th Anniversary Event
1/23-26 National Shooting and Sports Foundation Annual SHOT Show (Las Vegas, NV)
1/26-28 Houston Safari Club Annual Meeting (Houston, TX)
1/29 Society of Range Management Annual Meeting (Reno, Nevada)
1/31-2/3 Safari Club International Annual Meeting (Las Vegas, NV)
2/8- Texas Public Policy Foundation Policy Orientation (Austin, TX)
2/12 The Corps Network National Conference (Washington, DC)

Declining

1/4 Dallas Safari Club Annual Meeting (Dallas, TX)
1/11/18 EEI CEO and Board Conference (Phoenix, AZ)
2/9-10 Associated General Contractors Western Chapter Annual Meeting (La Jolla, CA)
2/23/18 West Slope Colorado Oil and Gas Association Annual Meeting (Grand

Junction, CO)

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

As DOI recovers from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, updates on progress will be included in the attached DOI EM Daily Situation Report on a weekly basis on Fridays. A summary follows here.

Interagency Hurricane response and recovery efforts:

OEPC Field Coordinators continue to support recovery operations in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Personnel from NPS and the USFWS are also supporting this initiative.

DOI has 23 employees supporting the Small Business Administration (SBA). The group is comprised of volunteers working in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Texas, California, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

Internal bureau and office-specific Hurricane response and recovery activities:

On December 20, NPS reported that all roads, trails, and beaches at the Virgin Islands National Park are open for visitor use. NPS is an important economic engine in the U.S. Virgin Islands, attracting more than a half a million visitors in 2016 and supporting 900 jobs in the community.

Wildfire Activity – California:

The Thomas Fire (being managed by CAL Fire) in southern California has burned approximately 272,600 (+600) acres and is 65-percent (+5) contained. The fire is being managed by a Type-1 Incident Management Team (IMT) with 4,729 (-1,017) personnel assigned, including 215 (-9) DOI personnel. All mandatory evacuation orders have been lifted, as increased humidity and calm winds enabled fire crews to push the Thomas Fire away from thousands of threatened homes in Santa Barbara County. The fire has affected several BLM parcels and burned over 4,600 acres of Reclamation's Ventura Project land in the vicinity of Lake Casitas. Significant demobilization of resources began on December 19 and full containment is expected January 7.

OUTSIDE MEDIA OF INTEREST (new)

NOMINATIONS CLEARED: Before heading out for holiday cheer, the Senate confirmed three energy-related nominations by unanimous consent: Linda Capuano to run the Energy Information Administration; Timothy Petty to be assistant Interior secretary for water and science; and John Vonglis to be chief financial officer of the Energy Department. The chamber also cleared four nominations to the Tennessee Valley Authority. **Try again:** It appears the White House will have to renominate Susan Combs to be Interior's assistant secretary of policy management and budget, and Ryan Nelson to be agency solicitor. Their forced do-overs come in addition to

Kathleen Hartnett White, who as expected must be renominated to run the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

U.S. Launches Effort To Reduce Reliance On Imports Of Critical Minerals.

Reuters (12/21, Volcovici) reports that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke on Thursday “launched an effort to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign supplies of critical minerals used in smartphones, computers and military equipment, which he said poses a national security and economic risk.” Under a directive from President Trump, Zinke will “work with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to publish in 60 days a list of non-fuel minerals that are vulnerable to supply chain disruptions and necessary for manufacturing and will develop a strategy to lessen U.S. dependence on foreign suppliers.” According to the article, “the policy would aim to identify new domestic sources of critical minerals; increase domestic exploration, mining and recycling; giving miners and producers electronic access to better mapping and geological data; and streamlining leasing and permitting for new mines.”

Trump Halts Funding For Offshore Drilling Safety Study.

The Hill (12/21, Cama) reports the Trump Administration has halted “its funding for a major study meant to improve how regulators enforce offshore oil and natural gas drilling safety.” On Thursday, the “congressionally chartered” National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine said the Department of Interior’s Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement “sent a stop-work order for the study earlier this month.” In a statement the National Academies said it is “disappointed” that the “important study has been stopped.” The Washington Post (12/21, Fears) reports Interior spokesman Gregory Julian “said the study was suspended because it might not be needed.” On Thursday afternoon he stated, “Simply put, we paused the study because it appeared to be duplicative of ongoing work.”

Bernhardt’s Schedules Reveal His Wide-Ranging Portfolio.

E&E Publishing (12/21, Doyle) reports that schedules obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show Interior Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt’s priorities since assuming office. According to the article, “the sage grouse debate captivated” Bernhardt “from his earliest days in office,” and it has “lingered atop his agenda.” The schedules also show “the outside advocacy groups and assorted individuals who have secured face time with Bernhardt in his sixth-floor Interior Department office, which visitors enter by passing next to a large stuffed polar bear.”

BP Spill Settlement Money Could Fund These 4 Outdoor Recreation Projects.

The New Orleans Times-Picayune (12/20, Baurick) reports that not all of the settlement funds paid by BP arising out of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon incident are being used for restoration projects. Roughly \$86 million out of the \$5 billion allotted for Louisiana “will go toward enhancing outdoor recreation in areas affected by the disaster.” The Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group issued a draft plan for the funds this week covering \$22 million that will be used for recreation projects. The plan

is open for public comment.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline Wants To Start Cutting Down Trees.

The Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch (12/21, Zullo) reports that “though it still lacks several key approvals, the Dominion Energy-led Atlantic Coast Pipeline project has asked federal regulators to allow workers to begin cutting down trees along some portions of the 600-mile route in West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina.” Dominion submitted the request to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission last week. Before FERC can approve the tree-cutting, however, “Dominion must finish consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on potential effects on sensitive species and reach an executed agreement as required under the National Historic Preservation Act.”

Surface-Mining Health Study That Trump Halted Could Be Finished With Other Funding.

The Lexington (KY) Herald-Leader (12/21, Estep) reports that “a national science panel might use donations to finish a study that the Trump Administration halted on whether people face greater health risks from living near surface coal mines in Central Appalachia.” The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine “said in a news release Thursday that private donors have expressed interest in financing the completion of the study.” The release said, “Given how important this study is to the citizens and communities surrounding these surface mining sites in Appalachia, the National Academies believe the study should be completed and are exploring options to do so.”

It’s Long Past Time To Drill For Oil And Gas In The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

In an op-ed for the Daily Caller (12/22, Brower, Jr.), Harry K. Brower, Jr., mayor of the North Slope Borough of Alaska, supports oil and gas exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Brower also notes that “the majority of local, tribal and regional leadership” in the North Slope Borough, as well as “the majority of residents from the Village of Kaktovik – the only people living within the 1002 coastal plain of ANWR support oil and gas development there.” Simply put, “the people who stand to be most impacted by development at ANWR widely support drilling in the refuge.”

Jones Reintroduces N. Topsail Beach Bill.

The Coastal Review (12/21) reports that Rep. Walter Jones “announced Wednesday that he had reintroduced a bill to change 30-year-old federal mapping that Jones and others say ‘incorrectly’ placed much of North Topsail Beach off-limits to federal money for development and disaster assistance, including the National Flood Insurance Program.” According to the article, “Jones and North Topsail Beach officials have long maintained that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s mappers in the early 1980s incorrectly classified more than 6,000 acres at the north end of Topsail Island as ‘undeveloped.’” Jones’ legislation would direct the Secretary

of Interior to revise the Coastal Barrier Resources Act map for North Topsail Beach.

FEDERAL REGISTER LISTINGS:

REG0007729 BIA Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget for Review and Approval; Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood -- This Notice, under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, announces that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) will ask the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to renew its approval of the collection of information for the Request for Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood (CDIB). The BIA is requesting public comments on the renewal for 30 days. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007730 BIA Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget for Review and Approval; Solicitation of Nominations for the Advisory Board for Exceptional Children -- This Notice, under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA), announces that the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) will ask the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to renew its approval of the collection of information regarding individuals' qualifications to serve on the Federal Advisory Board for Exceptional Children. The BIE is requesting public comments on the renewal for 30 days. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007735 BIA Approval of Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Regulations -- This Notice announces that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has approved the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community leasing ordinance under statutory authority specific to the Tribe. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007726 FWS Foreign Endangered Species; Issuance of Permits -- This batched notice informs the public that the Service has issued 7 Endangered Species Act permits. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007728 FWS Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Permit Applications -- This is a batched notice announcing the receipt by FWS of applications for Endangered Species Act (ESA) permits. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007731 NPS National Register of Historic Places, December 9, 2017 -- The NPS is soliciting comments on the significance of properties nominated before December 9, 2017, for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or related actions. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007673 OS Call for Nominations: Invasive Species Advisory Committee Renewal charter needed to be signed and filed before the FR Call for Nominations could be processed. Charter was signed on December 12, 2017 and filed on December 18, 2017. There are four (4) vacancies currently on the Committee. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007718 USGS Notice of Public Meeting: Advisory Committee on Water Information -- The Advisory Committee on Water Information will have a meeting on January 17-18, 2018, at the U.S. Geological Survey facility in Reston, VA. Notice

12/21/2017

Lori K. Mashburn

White House Liaison
Department of the Interior
202.208.1694

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- **December 21: Local BLM Release:** BLM-UT will release the June 2018 Oil and Gas Lease Sale EA for a 30-day public comment period. A total of four parcels comprised of 3,788 acres were nominated for potential leasing on lands managed by the Color Country District. The comment period closes January 23, 2018.
- **December 22: Local BLM Release:** The BLM-CA Central Coast Field Office intends to sign the Decision Record for the Trio Jacalitos Canyon APD in Fresno County, CA. This APD has been on hold since 2013 when the BLM identified the need for additional wildlife, botanical, and cultural inventories. The BLM review was reinitiated in 2017 when the proponents provided notice that the inventories were being completed. This APD is likely to draw the attention of environmental organizations. Public notification for the proposed APD was posted on the BLM's National NEPA Register on October 2, 2017.
- **December 27: Local BLM Release:** The BLM-CA El Centro Field Office anticipates signing a Notice to Proceed for commercial operation of the Tule Wind Project. Avangrid Renewables has a power purchase agreement with Southern California Edison to supply up to 132 megawatts of energy for a 15- year contract period. The Tule Wind Project is located in the eastern portion of the County of San Diego and consists of 57 turbines, 52 of which are on BLM public lands and 5 on private property.
- **December TBD: Local BLM Release:** the BLM-UT Moab Field Office intends to initiate scoping for a programmatic environmental assessment analyzing potential impacts of issuing Special Recreation Permits (SRP) for non-mechanized commercial and organized group activities. The proposed action would include use of designated roads and trails, interpretive sites, and established viewpoints in the Moab Field Office. The purpose is to facilitate timely response to SRP requests and to protect resources while still providing desired visitor experiences.
- **December TBD: Local BLM Release:** The BLM-UT Monticello Field Office plans to initiate scoping on three recreation projects to improve facilities at Grand Flats Campground and Shay Canyon and House on Fire Trailheads. The Shay Canyon Trailhead is in the Indian Creek Unit of the Bears Ears National Monument and the other two projects are in the Shash Jaa Unit. Visitation to the area has markedly increased in recent years.

Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement

- **December TBD: National BSEE Release:** BSEE will issue a press release highlighting the opening of the public comment period for the revised Production Safety Systems rule. The publication of the proposed rulemaking notice in the Federal Register marks the start of the 30-day comment period.

Land Buy Back Program

- **Jan. 3 (tent.): National LBBP Release:** The LBBP will issue a release on the 2017 Status Report to Indian Country and General national audience.

CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE (updated 12/18)

UPCOMING SENR HEARING: The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Water and Power Subcommittee is set to hold an oversight hearing on the benefits of title transfer and opportunities to improve the process. Other topics include what types of projects and transfers should need to be approved by Congress; the process for getting transfer of a projects including the level of environmental compliance that is required; and why projects are pursuing transfers (ability to finance, lower project costs, approval delays, etc). DOI witness is pending.

Timing: January 10, 2017

Contact: Amanda Kaster, Advisor, Congressional Affairs

DOI NOMINEES IN PROGRESS: Susan Combs (A/S PMB) passed out of committee August 3, 2017 and still awaits a vote. Ryan Nelson (Solicitor) appeared before the SENR committee on September 7, 2017 and is waiting for a vote. Tim Petty's (Asst. Secretary, Water & Science Nominee) was nominated November 14, 2017 and his nomination hearing was held on 12/5/17. He also passed out of committee and is awaiting final confirmation. **HE WAS CONFIRMED ON 12/21/2017.** Each nominee has continued to make themselves available to Senators for meetings and follow up. DOI OCL is working with OGE and the White House to get final approval for Asst. Sec. Indian Affairs nominee, Tara Sweeney before submitting her paperwork to the Senate. The White House nominated Steve Gardner for OSM. His Senate questionnaire is currently under review.

Contact: John Tanner, Director, Congressional Affairs

POLITICAL APPOINTEE UPDATE (updated)

DOI politicals on board 65

6 PAS confirmed as of 12/21/17

- **CONFIRMED: Tim Petty, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science**

5 nominated awaiting confirmation:

- **Required to re-nominate:** Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary Policy Management and Budget.
- **Required to re-nominate:** Ryan Douglas Nelson, Solicitor
- Pending Hearing: Tara Sweeney, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
- Pending Hearing: Steve Gardner, Director, Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation

Overall:

- Schedule C: 36 of 68 onboard; 2 starting; 6 in process
- NC-SES: 26 of 44 onboard; 3 starting; 1 in process
- PAS: 5 Confirmed; 5 Announced; 14 of 17 Submitted to PPO

SECRETARY SPEAKING INVITATIONS

Accepted:

1/22 – Alaska Federation of Natives - Challenges at America's Northernmost Border

2/9 – Western Hunting & Conservation Expo (Salt Lake City, Utah)

3/6-7 – CERA Week (Houston, Texas)

Open (date TBC)- Americans for Tax Reform (DC)

Open (date TBC)- Detroit Economic Club

Outstanding Invitations in Process:

1/12-13 – Montana Outfitters and Guides Association Winter Convention (Helena, MT)

1/13 – Battle of Cowpens 237th Anniversary Event

1/23-26 National Shooting and Sports Foundation Annual SHOT Show (Las Vegas, NV)

1/26-28 – Houston Safari Club Annual Meeting (Houston, TX)

1/29 – Society of Range Management Annual Meeting (Reno, Nevada)

1/31-2/3 Safari Club International Annual Meeting (Las Vegas, NV)

2/8- Texas Public Policy Foundation Policy Orientation (Austin, TX)

2/12 – The Corps Network National Conference (Washington, DC)

Declining

1/4 – Dallas Safari Club Annual Meeting (Dallas, TX)

1/11/18 – EEI CEO and Board Conference (Phoenix, AZ)

2/9-10 Associated General Contractors Western Chapter Annual Meeting (La Jolla, CA)

2/23/18 – West Slope Colorado Oil and Gas Association Annual Meeting (Grand Junction, CO)

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

As DOI recovers from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, updates on progress will be included in the attached DOI EM Daily Situation Report on a weekly basis on Fridays. A summary follows here.

Interagency Hurricane response and recovery efforts:

OEPC Field Coordinators continue to support recovery operations in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Personnel from NPS and the USFWS are also supporting this initiative.

DOI has 23 employees supporting the Small Business Administration (SBA). The group is comprised of volunteers working in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Texas, California, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

Internal bureau and office-specific Hurricane response and recovery activities:

On December 20, NPS reported that all roads, trails, and beaches at the Virgin Islands National Park are open for visitor use. NPS is an important economic engine in the U.S. Virgin Islands, attracting more than a half a million visitors in 2016 and supporting 900 jobs in the community.

Wildfire Activity – California:

The Thomas Fire (being managed by CAL Fire) in southern California has burned approximately 272,600 (+600) acres and is 65-percent (+5) contained. The fire is being managed by a Type-1 Incident Management Team (IMT) with 4,729 (-1,017) personnel assigned, including 215 (-9) DOI personnel. All mandatory evacuation orders have been lifted, as increased humidity and calm winds enabled fire crews to push the Thomas Fire away from thousands of threatened homes in Santa Barbara County. The fire has affected several BLM parcels and burned over 4,600 acres of Reclamation's Ventura Project land in the vicinity of Lake Casitas. Significant demobilization of resources began on December 19 and full containment is expected January 7.

OUTSIDE MEDIA OF INTEREST (new)

NOMINATIONS CLEARED: Before heading out for holiday cheer, the Senate confirmed three energy-related nominations by unanimous consent: Linda Capuano to run the Energy Information

Administration; Timothy Petty to be assistant Interior secretary for water and science; and John Vonglis to be chief financial officer of the Energy Department. The chamber also cleared four nominations to the Tennessee Valley Authority. **Try again:** It appears the White House will have to renominate Susan Combs to be Interior's assistant secretary of policy management and budget, and Ryan Nelson to be agency solicitor. Their forced do-overs come in addition to Kathleen Hartnett White, who as expected must be renominated to run the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

U.S. Launches Effort To Reduce Reliance On Imports Or Critical Minerals.

Reuters (12/21, Volcovici) reports that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke on Thursday "launched an effort to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign supplies of critical minerals used in smartphones, computers and military equipment, which he said poses a national security and economic risk." Under a directive from President Trump, Zinke will "work with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to publish in 60 days a list of non-fuel minerals that are vulnerable to supply chain disruptions and necessary for manufacturing and will develop a strategy to lessen U.S. dependence on foreign suppliers." According to the article, "the policy would aim to identify new domestic sources of critical minerals; increase domestic exploration, mining and recycling; giving miners and producers electronic access to better mapping and geological data; and streamlining leasing and permitting for new mines."

Trump Halts Funding For Offshore Drilling Safety Study.

The Hill (12/21, Cama) reports the Trump Administration has halted "its funding for a major study meant to improve how regulators enforce offshore oil and natural gas drilling safety." On Thursday, the "congressionally chartered" National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine said the Department of Interior's Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement "sent a stop-work order for the study earlier this month." In a statement the National Academies said it is "disappointed" that the "important study has been stopped." The Washington Post (12/21, Fears) reports Interior spokesman Gregory Julian "said the study was suspended because it might not be needed." On Thursday afternoon he stated, "Simply put, we paused the study because it appeared to be duplicative of ongoing work."

Bernhardt's Schedules Reveal His Wide-Ranging Portfolio.

E&E Publishing (12/21, Doyle) reports that schedules obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show Interior Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt's priorities since assuming office. According to the article, "the sage grouse debate captivated" Bernhardt "from his earliest days in office," and it has "lingered atop his agenda." The schedules also show "the outside advocacy groups and assorted individuals who have secured face time with Bernhardt in his sixth-floor Interior Department office, which visitors enter by passing next to a large stuffed polar bear."

BP Spill Settlement Money Could Fund These 4 Outdoor Recreation Projects.

The New Orleans Times-Picayune (12/20, Baurick) reports that not all of the settlement funds paid by BP arising out of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon incident are being used for restoration projects. Roughly \$86 million out of the \$5 billion allotted for Louisiana "will go toward enhancing outdoor recreation in areas affected by the disaster." The Louisiana Trustee Implementation Group issued a draft plan for the funds this week covering \$22 million that will be used for recreation projects. The plan is open for public comment.

Atlantic Coast Pipeline Wants To Start Cutting Down Trees.

The Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch (12/21, Zullo) reports that "though it still lacks several key approvals, the Dominion Energy-led Atlantic Coast Pipeline project has asked federal regulators to allow workers to

begin cutting down trees along some portions of the 600-mile route in West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina.” Dominion submitted the request to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission last week. Before FERC can approve the tree-cutting, however, “Dominion must finish consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on potential effects on sensitive species and reach an executed agreement as required under the National Historic Preservation Act.”

Surface-Mining Health Study That Trump Halted Could Be Finished With Other Funding.

The Lexington (KY) Herald-Leader (12/21, Estep) reports that “a national science panel might use donations to finish a study that the Trump Administration halted on whether people face greater health risks from living near surface coal mines in Central Appalachia.” The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine “said in a news release Thursday that private donors have expressed interest in financing the completion of the study.” The release said, “Given how important this study is to the citizens and communities surrounding these surface mining sites in Appalachia, the National Academies believe the study should be completed and are exploring options to do so.”

It’s Long Past Time To Drill For Oil And Gas In The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

In an op-ed for the Daily Caller (12/22, Brower, Jr.), Harry K. Brower, Jr., mayor of the North Slope Borough of Alaska, supports oil and gas exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Brower also notes that “the majority of local, tribal and regional leadership” in the North Slope Borough, as well as “the majority of residents from the Village of Kaktovik – the only people living within the 1002 coastal plain of ANWR – support oil and gas development there.” Simply put, “the people who stand to be most impacted by development at ANWR widely support drilling in the refuge.”

Jones Reintroduces N. Topsail Beach Bill.

The Coastal Review (12/21) reports that Rep. Walter Jones “announced Wednesday that he had reintroduced a bill to change 30-year-old federal mapping that Jones and others say ‘incorrectly’ placed much of North Topsail Beach off-limits to federal money for development and disaster assistance, including the National Flood Insurance Program.” According to the article, “Jones and North Topsail Beach officials have long maintained that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s mappers in the early 1980s incorrectly classified more than 6,000 acres at the north end of Topsail Island as ‘undeveloped.’” Jones’ legislation would direct the Secretary of Interior to revise the Coastal Barrier Resources Act map for North Topsail Beach.

FEDERAL REGISTER LISTINGS:

REG0007729 BIA Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget for Review and Approval; Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood -- This Notice, under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, announces that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) will ask the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to renew its approval of the collection of information for the Request for Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood (CDIB). The BIA is requesting public comments on the renewal for 30 days. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007730 BIA Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget for Review and Approval; Solicitation of Nominations for the Advisory Board for Exceptional Children -- This Notice, under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA), announces that the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) will ask the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to renew its approval of the collection of information regarding individuals' qualifications to serve on the Federal Advisory Board for

Exceptional Children. The BIE is requesting public comments on the renewal for 30 days. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007735 BIA Approval of Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Regulations -- This Notice announces that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has approved the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community leasing ordinance under statutory authority specific to the Tribe. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007726 FWS Foreign Endangered Species; Issuance of Permits -- This batched notice informs the public that the Service has issued 7 Endangered Species Act permits. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007728 FWS Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Permit Applications -- This is a batched notice announcing the receipt by FWS of applications for Endangered Species Act (ESA) permits. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007731 NPS National Register of Historic Places, December 9, 2017 -- The NPS is soliciting comments on the significance of properties nominated before December 9, 2017, for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or related actions. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007673 OS Call for Nominations: Invasive Species Advisory Committee Renewal charter needed to be signed and filed before the FR Call for Nominations could be processed. Charter was signed on December 12, 2017 and filed on December 18, 2017. There are four (4) vacancies currently on the Committee. Notice 12/21/2017

REG0007718 USGS Notice of Public Meeting: Advisory Committee on Water Information -- The Advisory Committee on Water Information will have a meeting on January 17-18, 2018, at the U.S. Geological Survey facility in Reston, VA. Notice 12/21/2017