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1. Senate to release Interior-EPA bill

Kellie Lunney, Sean Reilly and Arianna Skibell, E&E News reporters

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

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

2. Dinosaur fossil airlifted from Grand Staircase-Escalante

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

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

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6. Budget week in Senate as ANWR fight waits offstage

Geof Koss, E&E News reporter

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Senate Republicans this week will attempt to pass a budget resolution, which not only is crucial to big-ticket agenda items such as tax reform and the annual appropriations process but also will revive the long and bitter fight over drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

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

7. Bipartisan bill would extend mapping program

Cecelia Smith-Schoenwalder, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

Colorado Republican Rep. Doug Lamborn last week introduced a bipartisan bill that would reauthorize a national geological mapping program that is set to expire next year.

<http://bit.ly/2wZV8jK>

8. Senators to question OPM nominee

Kevin Bogardus, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

This week, senators will get to probe several of President Trump's nominees who will impact the federal workforce, including who could be the government's personnel chief.

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

9. Interior quietly exploring Izembek land swap — docs

Scott Streater, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

The Interior Department is exploring a proposal to exchange two parcels owned by an Alaskan tribal corporation for lands within the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge that would be used to route a controversial gravel road through a wilderness area.

<http://bit.ly/2zv6HkG>

10. Department set to announce forester as BIA head

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

The Interior Department today is expected to name wildland firefighter and seasoned federal administrator Bryan Rice as the new director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

<http://bit.ly/2yp0feI>

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Meredith C. Black

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1. Senate to release Interior-EPA bill

Kellie Lunney, Sean Reilly and Arianna Skibell, E&E News reporters

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

Senate appropriators aren't likely to follow the White House's lead this week when they mark up their fiscal 2018 spending bill for U.S. EPA and the Interior Department.

Republicans and Democrats on the committee have expressed dissatisfaction with a range of recommended reductions from the Trump administration, including to Interior's Land and Water Conservation Fund and EPA's overall budget.

The Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, led by Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), will consider the bill tomorrow. The full committee plans to take up the legislation Thursday.

Concerns over Appropriations Chairman Thad Cochran's health, however, could lead to a schedule change. The Mississippi Republican has been recovering at home for the past few weeks from a urological procedure.

EPA

Murkowski at a June hearing put the White House on notice: There was no chance the panel would swallow the administration's proposal to slash EPA's budget by almost one-third, from \$8.1 billion in fiscal 2017 to \$5.7 billion this year.

"We've pushed back against these cuts in the past, and I will encourage my colleagues to do so again," Murkowski told EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt in alluding to plans to reduce or zero out funding for water grants for Alaska Native villages and other programs (*Greenwire*, June 27).

Ranking member Tom Udall (D-N.M.) was even more adamantly opposed to the administration blueprint, meaning that one outcome could be a proposed 2018 spending bill that only trims EPA's overall budget.

Targeted airshed grants, which benefit areas like Fairbanks, Alaska, that have severe soot problems, are virtually assured of at least staying at the \$30 million level.

Senate appropriators are also unlikely to accept the administration's proposal to slash Diesel Emissions Reduction Act grants from \$60 million in 2017 to \$10 million this year.

The DERA program, backed by both industry and environmental groups, hands out money to replace or retool older diesel-burning vehicles and other equipment.

In its version of the 2018 EPA spending bill, for example, the House Appropriations Committee pumped up DERA funding to \$75 million while increasing targeted airshed grants to \$40 million.

Senate appropriators will probably also bat down the White House's bid to chop or eliminate spending for cleanup efforts on the Great Lakes and other locales.

Within the bill's fine print, however, senators could again be squeezed to make trade-offs to pay for high-profile priorities.

In the wake of scandal over lead-tainted drinking water in Flint, Mich., for example, Murkowski last year trumpeted a proposed 18 percent increase in the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, which helps pay for water projects. But that recommended increase had to be offset with cuts in other areas, such as EPA's clean air and climate programs.

And while Senate appropriators are less enamored of policy riders than their House counterparts, Murkowski's panel is expected to renew one provision added last year that requires EPA to consider forest biomass as carbon-neutral.

The panel could also again vote to allow construction of a gravel road through Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. The House in July approved a land exchange aimed at bringing the long-contested road to fruition (*Greenwire*, July 20).

Still to be seen is how the subcommittee handles the White House's request to set aside \$68 million for workforce restructuring at EPA in fiscal 2018. The House Appropriations Committee approved about \$58 million in its version of the bill.

Interior

Interior likely will see cuts for several of its agencies and programs in the fiscal 2018 Senate bill, but not as steep as the White House would like.

Murkowski during a June budget hearing made it clear that she wasn't in favor of wholesale cuts to certain programs just to "hit a budget number."

The proposed cuts she said were "troubling" included reductions to programs that convey land titles to tribes and provide localities with payments in lieu of taxes.

She did praise other aspects of the proposed budget, including fully funding fire suppression activities at the 10-year average.

Montana Democratic Sen. Jon Tester was far less diplomatic in comments to E&E News shortly after Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke testified on the department's request this summer.

"These guys [at the White House] craft a piece of crap like this budget, and then they expect the secretaries to defend it," he said (*E&E Daily*, June 27).

Conservation groups are keeping an eye out for possible policy riders they oppose, including language related to the Endangered Species Act and sage grouse.

They are also wary of any provisions that try to increase logging opportunities or make changes to the National Environmental Policy Act in the name of wildfire mitigation, particularly after this season's deadly fires.

Democrats on the committee could try to offer amendments that look into Zinke's travel budget, given the recent controversy and ensuing investigation into the secretary's official travel expenses.

The House, which passed its Interior-EPA funding bill in September as part of a larger spending package, provides \$11.9 billion for Interior, a slight decrease from the \$12.3 billion Congress appropriated in the fiscal 2017 omnibus.

It cuts funding for several Interior agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Geological Survey, albeit not as much as the administration had proposed in most cases.

And the House version also contains an amendment from Rep. Chris Stewart (R-Utah) that would give Interior more flexibility to euthanize wild horses and would prohibit them from being used for human consumption.

Climate, methane

While it's unclear how the Senate will handle climate-change-related provisions after a cascade of hurricanes this season, House appropriators rejected numerous climate proposals in their spending legislation.

A proposal by Rep. Matt Cartwright (D-Pa.) to add language to the House bill's report requiring agencies to prepare for the threat posed by climate change failed 21-29.

House lawmakers also adopted two amendments to their eight-bill fiscal 2018 omnibus package to ban the use of the social cost of carbon metric and EPA's methane emissions guidelines.

The administration already has tried to block the use of the social cost of carbon, though analysts say the metric could resurface given courts have upheld it several times.

While Pruitt has moved to block Obama's methane emissions rule, the plan has run into resistance from the courts, making its future uncertain.

Also this week, Senate appropriators are set to release and vote on legislation to fund the Department of Homeland Security, which could include provisions related to chemical safety.

Progress on spending bills in the House and Senate will help in negotiations to craft a broad bicameral agreement for the rest of the fiscal year.

Schedule: The Interior-EPA subcommittee markup is Tuesday, Oct. 17, at 9:30 a.m. in 124 Dirksen.

Schedule: The Homeland Security subcommittee markup is Tuesday, Oct. 17, at 3 p.m. in 138 Dirksen.

Schedule: The full committee markup is Thursday, Oct. 19, at 10:30 a.m. in 106 Dirksen.

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

2. Dinosaur fossil airlifted from Grand Staircase-Escalante

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

A *Tyrannosaurus* fossil was airlifted yesterday from Utah's Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument to a natural history museum.

The fossil appears to be 80 percent intact, making it the most complete tyrannosaur fossil ever discovered in the Southwest.

Alan Titus, a paleontologist at the Natural History Museum of Utah, found the fossil two years ago on the Kaiparowits Plateau. It's likely from a *Teratophoneus*, a cousin of the *Tyrannosaurus rex* that was around 12 feet tall.

"This discovery exemplifies the uniqueness of the fossils in the Staircase," said Randy Irmis, paleontology curator at the museum. "Regardless if it's a *Teratophoneus* or something new, these are things found only in Grand Staircase. These are world-class paleontological resources."

The discovery comes as Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke wants to shrink Grand Staircase-Escalante and five other monuments (*Greenwire*, Sept. 18).

In a leaked memo, Zinke noted that the Utah monument contains an estimated several billion tons of oil and coal deposits (Brian Maffly, *Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 15). — **MJ**

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

3. 3 Western groups unite to promote 'common sense' land policy

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

Three conservation groups representing Western rural communities and interests announced a new coalition aimed to influence federal policy on large-scale resource planning, including cooperative management of private and public lands.

The New Mexico-based Western Landowners Alliance, the Oregon-based Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition and the Texas-based Partners for Conservation will continue to maintain their individual organizations but recently issued a series of six core principles that will guide each group's work to influence federal agencies and lawmakers.

"Each one of us is out here doing this work," WLA Executive Director Lesli Allison said. "We decided it would be useful for us to work together, sharing best ideas and seeing what the others were up to."

More than 130 organizations also signed on to a letter to the Trump administration and Congress announcing the trio's new "values statement," she added, noting that many of those involved were inspired to counteract the partisanship that has created gridlock on Capitol Hill.

Although the coalition has yet to determine what specific legislation or policies it will target, Allison suggested the trio will discuss topics including the farm bill and federal land management policies.

"There really is an appetite for finding common ground and working constructively toward positive solutions for a positive future," Allison said. "As a nation or as a community, we're never going to get where we want to go if we're divided, and we're seeing such polarization today that it's alarming to most of us out here."

Among the coalition's six core principles is a call for "common sense and nonpartisan solutions" to ensure sustainable working lands.

The coalition also calls for large-scale resource planning "that is cross-boundary and inclusive, and science and place-based," as well as encouraging voluntary or market- and incentive-based programs to encourage conservation.

Partners for Conservation Executive Director Steve Jester said the group's goals are to conserve working landscapes "irrespective of what the narrative of the moment is."

"It's awfully easy to get caught up in the dynamic or the storyline that nothing is working and there's conflict everywhere. At least from our organization's standpoint, that's not the case," he said.

While the groups have yet to determine which legislation or policies they will target, Jester said his organization aims in part to educate about landscape sustainability.

"There is a significant investment in conservation across the country, and there has been for a number of years," he said. "We feel like when folks can come together and collaborate and each take a little piece of the problem, we can sure stretch our dollars and improve our effectiveness."

Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition Director Karen Hardigg, whose organization is focused on rural communities surrounded by public lands, said the coalition could also focus on ensuring proper funding for agencies that oversee the federal estate.

"There are a lot of opportunities in front of us," Hardigg said. "We need Congress and this administration to invest in our public agencies and partners that help us get this work done on the ground."

<http://bit.ly/2ysx2Bi>

4. Same uniform company, but new fashion line coming

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

Here come the new Interior Department uniforms, greener than ever.

In a fashion move that follows surprisingly high-level scrutiny, the National Park Service has once again selected a company called VF Imagewear to provide uniforms for seven Interior agencies and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The five-year contract is worth an estimated \$60 million. And though the contractor remains the same, officials believe those who wear the uniforms will be happier.

"The major difference is that the uniform items will be manufactured with textiles and technologies better suited to the environmental demands and working conditions of ... employees," the National Park Service said in a statement.

The uniforms will shift from a custom earth green color to a commercially available forest green color, which is supposed to increase the variety of clothing options.

NPS, which handled the uniform contract serving the various agencies, declined to say how many companies offered bids (*Greenwire*, Sept. 27).

But in a statement summarizing the contract award, issued Friday, the agency declared that "the clothing will fit and feel better since items will be made with performance oriented fabrics that are moisture wicking, breathable, stretchable, and anti-microbial."

The agency also cited "improved fade resistance, greater stain resistance, higher recycled material content, simpler care and cleaning requirements, and UV and insect protection either as a function of garment weave or via applied treatments."

All of which may sound mundane but matters a great deal to the 35,000 or so federal employees directly affected.

The need for new uniforms became one of the hot topics repeatedly cited by staffers on Interior's electronic "ideas box," established earlier this year. Deputy Interior Secretary David Bernhardt advised employees in a memo that "your comments have reinforced the very real need" of updating uniforms.

VF Imagewear has supplied uniforms for other federal organizations, including the Transportation Security Administration and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. The firm is a subsidiary of VF Corp., a North Carolina-based business whose brands include Lee, Wrangler and the North Face.

The new contract will cover the Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Park Police, Bureau of Land Management, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Bureau of Reclamation, and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, in addition to the Park Service and Army Corps.

The contract also spans a wide array of items that might be needed annually, from 2,412 tie tacks for the National Park Service to 119 indoor vests for BLM employees.

"Uniforms and related equipment that can effectively meet the variable climate and work conditions of the Uniformed Bureaus are a high priority, and will require commercially modern and flexible approaches to fabrics, patterns and finishing," the request for proposal stated in May.

The rollout will take place in stages. Old items will be sold until their supplies are depleted. Some employees will soon start testing new articles and will recommend whether adjustments need to be made.

The first wave of new uniform items should be available by next spring. Old uniform pieces will be grandfathered in and can be worn until the end of the life of the garment.

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

5. Coal plant closures are coming to Texas. Now what?

Edward Klump, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

If anyone needed a reminder of the breadth of change coming to the power sector, Vistra Energy Corp. offered a big one last week.

The company said Friday that its Luminant subsidiary plans to close the Big Brown and Sandow coal-fueled power plants in Texas. That came a week after Luminant disclosed a decision to retire its Monticello plant, which also runs on coal.

Those moves could push more than 4,000 megawatts of coal power offline in Texas' main electric grid in the early part of 2018. Observers have been expecting Texas coal retirements, but the news is jolting in part because of the scope and timing.

Friday was a day the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) set aside for a staff-led workshop to explore possible market changes that might result in higher wholesale prices. Earlier in the week, President Trump's U.S. EPA moved to withdraw the Clean Power Plan, which was intended to curb carbon dioxide emissions. EPA is taking a lighter approach to regulations generally, and a new version of regional haze oversight in Texas has been blasted by critics (*Greenwire*, Oct. 3).

None of that apparently was enough for Vistra. In its Friday announcement, the company cited low wholesale power prices, low natural gas prices, "an oversupplied renewable generation market" and other factors.

"Trump can repeal environmental rules, but he can't repeal economics," said Daniel Cohan, an associate professor of environmental engineering at Rice University. "I think you're seeing market forces take over on this."

The U.S. power sector also is wrestling with a controversial Department of Energy proposal that could aid coal and nuclear plants in the context of reliability and resilience if backed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (*Greenwire*, Oct. 13). The plan wouldn't affect the main Texas market directly, but it could have ripple effects.

It's also true that Friday's Vistra release said a sales process would be explored for the Big Brown site, leaving the door open to a different ending there. And the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), the state's main power grid operator, said it had anticipated some unit retirements and will evaluate possible effects of planned closures.

"ERCOT will study whether these specific units are needed for transmission system reliability in their respective areas of the grid and will make those determinations by December," the council said in a statement.

ERCOT plans to incorporate proposed resource changes into its final seasonal assessment of winter resource adequacy and an upcoming report on capacity, demand and reserves.

Many questions remain about the effects of closures, such as whether a potential boost in power prices might encourage other aging plants to hang around. The workshop in Texas wasn't meant to settle issues Friday, as state regulators will weigh in on the path ahead. Some generators see a need to improve how prices are formed, but not everyone in the market is certain of the problems or solutions.

Regardless, environmental groups were in a celebratory mood Friday. Sierra Club said the three Luminant coal plants emitted about 166 million pounds of sulfur dioxide, 24 million pounds of nitrogen oxides and 21 million tons of carbon dioxide pollution last year.

"This watershed moment in clean air and water advocacy across the country is also a milestone for public health," Sierra Club declared in a separate release on progress battling coal plants since 2010.

By the group's tally, 262 coal plants have either retired or announced retirements, with another 261 remaining. Sierra Club tracks U.S. coal plant sites, though the definition of what is a distinct plant can vary by location.

Crushed by shale gas

Vistra emerged last year as a company built on the competitive remnants of Energy Future Holdings Corp., or EFH, which was formed through a leveraged buyout of TXU Corp. in 2007 and struggled because of debt and low power prices. It filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2014.

Vistra is looking to carve a new path these days, and it has interests tied to natural gas and renewable energy. *The Wall Street Journal* previously suggested Vistra was taking a look at Dynegy Inc., another power producer. While such an acquisition hasn't materialized, Vistra has indicated it may look to expand as it also keeps a focus on a strong balance sheet.

Luminant's website shows five coal-fueled power plants, though three are now expected to stop generating power next year. Big Brown has two coal units that began operating in the 1970s, the same decade three units opened at Monticello. Then there's Sandow and its two coal units — one from the early 1980s and another from 2009, a reminder that coal's troubles aren't limited to the oldest units.

Vistra CEO Curt Morgan said it was difficult to decide to shut Big Brown and Sandow. The company plans to take tens of millions of dollars in charges related to its plant decisions.

"Though the long-term economic viability of these plants has been in question for some time, our year-long analysis indicates this announcement is now necessary," Morgan said in a statement.

Vistra estimated that about 450 employees would be affected by the closure of Sandow and a mine that supports the plant. Some 200 employees could be affected by the Big Brown closure. Vistra said a mine that supports that plant already was scheduled to wind down operations by the end of this year.

CreditSights, in a Friday report, noted the planned departure of Monticello and said the economics at Sandow and Big Brown were "crushed by cheap shale gas" and gas produced along with shale oil.

"The removal of these coal plants should be a positive for any existing generators in Texas as the amount of capacity coming offline could result in a tighter market but the continuous growth from renewable generation (mostly wind) will more than likely offset any of the lost generation from these plants," CreditSights said.

While there was no word on Luminant's Martin Lake plant, CreditSights called it "another troubled coal plant" that is "also expected to be retired soon." Other coal unit retirements are either planned or possible from other parties in the ERCOT region, so Luminant's units likely won't be the last to exit the market in the foreseeable future.

For ERCOT, the signs continue to point to a changing power mix that includes a chunk of wind energy that is intermittent.

The grid operator has said installed wind capacity may exceed 21,000 MW by the end of this year and top 24,000 MW by the end of 2018. Installed coal, on the other hand, was listed at less than 20,000 MW for ERCOT in summer 2018 and beyond even before the recent Luminant retirement announcements.

Rice's Cohan expressed confidence that generation from flexible gas as well as wind and solar could help keep the lights on in ERCOT's region.

"There's been a lot of slack in the system recently," he said.

Scott Segal, director of the Electric Reliability Coordinating Council (ERCC), of which Vistra is a member, argued that Friday's news wasn't a rejection of the role coal plays on the grid. Instead, he said, the moves are part of having a diverse set of generation.

"For Vistra, as for many generators across the nation, that means balanced investments in coal, nuclear, natural gas and renewables," Segal said in a statement. "Vistra customers will continue to benefit from well-managed coal operations."

Through September, coal accounted for roughly 32 percent of the power used in ERCOT's region this year, while wind's share was about 17 percent. Both trailed generators tied to gas, which accounted for about 40 percent of power use in the region.

Turning to regulators

A national conversation is underway about what to do about the evolving U.S. power generation mix, especially in light of subsidies provided for nuclear power in some states and the Department of Energy's proposal that could help coal and nuclear while altering certain markets.

Looking at Texas, NRG Energy Inc. and Calpine Corp., two major generators, funded a study by Harvard University's William Hogan and FTI Consulting's Susan Pope on potential ERCOT changes. That led to a discussion with PUC members earlier this year (*Energywire*, Aug. 11). On Friday, a staff-led workshop was another step in a process to consider possible tweaks to the "energy-only" ERCOT market.

Bill Barnes of NRG spoke of a desire for wholesale price formation that promotes economic efficiency. He said the ERCOT market isn't broken.

"But we do see a lot of opportunities for improvement in how prices are formed that could create persistent issues if left unresolved," he said.

Randy Jones, who was speaking on behalf of Calpine, said the company and NRG aren't trying to pick winners and losers as some may suggest.

"We want to make sure that the market is a winner," he said. "And we think we have good solutions that are supported by macroeconomic principles and fundamentals."

At the PUC session in August, Hogan and Pope had a presentation deck to run through some key recommendations.

One idea could aid the efficiency of regionwide prices by including a marginal cost of transmission losses from energy market dispatch and pricing. Another idea is to enhance a systemwide calculation tied to the Operating Reserve Demand Curve, which has been designed to help reflect a higher value of power during certain periods when supplies are tight.

Other ideas relate to out-of-market actions tied to managing transmission constraints, dispatch and pricing for local reserve scarcity, and transmission planning and cost recovery. Not all of these may be addressed in the near term, and alliances can shift depending on the proposal.

Texas Industrial Energy Consumers has indicated the market is working well and suggested a conservative approach to possible changes. Katie Coleman, who represents the group, said Friday that policy decisions need to stay in place for a period of time.

"These terms like energy-only market and price formation have turned into sort of like these marketing slogans that are devoid of any content," Coleman said. They're being used, she said, to support proposals "that really are not premised on anything" with a sound economic underpinning.

Vistra has pitched its own ideas. A filing discussed the option of a requirement for new generation to self-fund some or all of the cost of interconnecting to the grid. Another idea is a possible price adder at times when dispatchable thermal resources are needed to serve load but aren't price-setting.

Calpine's Jones sounded concerned about the idea of introducing a new revenue stream. He said subsidies beget subsidies, noting tax credits that go to renewables.

"It seems like we would be compounding it, and we'd just be setting the stage for somebody else to ask for" another subsidy, he said.

Amanda Frazier, who's involved in regulatory policy at Vistra, said she didn't think it was a subsidy. Instead, she said, the idea is to make sure certain prices reflect the actual costs of units being used to serve load.

A representative of the ERCOT region's independent market monitor expressed openness to various changes, but in the context of discussing Vistra's ideas said the office is deeply troubled by a proposal that could remove certain incentives to operate efficiently.

This all means Texas regulators have plenty to ponder. Julia Harvey of the PUC staff outlined a plan to bring a master list of recommendations to the commissioners.

"We'll do our best to kind of sort through those and make a call on prioritization and whether some of the issues can maybe reasonably be delegated back to ERCOT," Harvey said, "and whether some of them are so complex that they deserve their own projects."

<http://bit.ly/2zua7nF>

6. Budget week in Senate as ANWR fight waits offstage

Geof Koss, E&E News reporter

Published: Monday, October 16, 2017

Senate Republicans this week will attempt to pass a budget resolution, which not only is crucial to big-ticket agenda items such as tax reform and the annual appropriations process but also will revive the long and bitter fight over drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Senators will return this evening from a weeklong break to vote on the nomination of Callista Gingrich to be U.S. ambassador to the Vatican. The chamber will vote tomorrow morning on the nomination of David Trachtenberg to be principal deputy undersecretary of Defense.

A vote is also expected at some point on the \$36.5 billion emergency disaster package the House passed last week to help states and U.S. territories grappling with the effects of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, as well as widespread Western wildfires (*E&E News PM*, Oct. 12).

The decision by House leaders not to include controversial reforms to the National Flood Insurance Program sought by the Trump administration should ease passage in the Senate.

The timing of that vote is uncertain, as there may be lingering pressure from conservatives who wanted to see offsets included in the package.

Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney is not necessarily calling for offsets but penned a letter to appropriators to envision cuts because of the storm spending.

Still, it's the budget resolution that will dominate the Senate floor this week. The blueprint, expected to come up tomorrow, is subject to 50 hours of debate split between the two parties.

That debate will culminate Thursday in a free-wheeling "vote-a-rama," during which senators occupy the floor for hours on end, voting on politically sensitive amendments.

Marathon sessions such as this one, expected to carry into the early hours of Friday, have historically been a venue for both parties to force their colleagues to go on the record on climate change and energy policies.

Messaging votes aside, the budget could have very real implications for opening ANWR to oil and gas drilling, a longtime goal of the Alaska delegation. Under the budget reconciliation process, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) was tasked with finding \$1 billion in deficit savings through the committee's jurisdiction.



House Speaker Paul Ryan (R Wis.) arrived in Puerto Rico on Friday. Paul Ryan/Twitter
Legislation opening ANWR, which would create this revenue, could then be attached to the Senate's tax reform bill, under which budget rules can pass by a simple majority (*E&E Daily*, Oct. 6).

Democrats and interest groups are determined not to let that happen. Energy and Natural Resources Committee ranking member Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), who helped kill a similar push to open ANWR in 2005, vowed last month to "fight tooth-and-nail until this attempt fails, too."

Two Republican senators who have opposed ANWR drilling in the past, Maine's Susan Collins and Arizona's John McCain, said recently that they are undecided on the issue.

The Alaska Wilderness League and Alaska Natives will hit Capitol Hill next week for an "Arctic Refuge Day of Action and Rally" that will feature Reps. Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) and Jared Huffman (D-Calif.).

The liberal Center for American Progress last week released an analysis concluding that offering oil and gas leases in ANWR is unlikely to yield no more than \$37.5 million for the Treasury, thereby failing to meet the revenue targets dictated in the Senate budget.

Once the Senate passes its own budget, it must still reconcile its version with the House's, which directs the Natural Resources Committee to find \$5 billion in deficit reduction. ANWR is among the options House members will look at, in addition to other policies that ease drilling limits on federal property both onshore and offshore.

Finalizing a budget may also help along efforts to negotiate top-line spending levels for fiscal 2018, which must be addressed in some fashion by the Dec. 8 expiration of the current continuing resolution. Negotiations to raise spending caps before automatic cuts kick in are ongoing but not complete, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) told reporters last week.

"We're going down that path," she said Thursday, noting that she anticipates the usual battle over "poison pill" policy riders will resurface. "We hope to be finished by Dec. 8 or even sooner. This is the debate we've had, and this is the debate we've always won. And hopefully it won't be that controversial, but we'll see."

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

7. Bipartisan bill would extend mapping program

Cecelia Smith Schoenwalder, E&E News reporter

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Colorado Republican Rep. Doug Lamborn last week introduced a bipartisan bill that would reauthorize a national geological mapping program that is set to expire next year.

H.R. 4033, which Rep. Anthony Brown (D-Md.) co-sponsored, would continue the National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program through 2023. Geologic maps can be used by researchers to find natural resources for exploration and extraction. They can also be useful for water management, natural hazard mitigation and federal land management.

Sens. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Angus King (I-Maine) introduced a nearly identical bill last month (E&E Daily, Sept. 15).

"We don't have a detailed geologic map for even one-third of the United States, yet it lays the foundation for minimizing risks from natural hazards and is the linchpin to reducing our nation's dependence on foreign minerals," Murkowski said at the time.

The program is the primary source of funds for creating geologic maps in the U.S. and provides mapping training to students.

<http://bit.ly/2wZV8jK>

8. Senators to question OPM nominee

Kevin Bogardus, E&E News reporter

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This week, senators will get to probe several of President Trump's nominees who will impact the federal workforce, including who could be the government's personnel chief.

Trump has nominated Jeff Pon to be director of the Office of Personnel Management. Pon is one of three nominees the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee will consider at a hearing Wednesday.

Pon most recently was a top executive at the Society for Human Resource Management, as well as the chief operating officer for Futures Inc., which helps military veterans transition into civilian jobs. A former Booz Allen Hamilton Inc. principal, Pon has also served in the Department of Energy and OPM in the past.

If confirmed, Pon would be a key figure in Trump's effort to reshape the federal government. The agency is essentially the government's human resources hub, managing federal employees' hiring, training, and health and retirement benefits, as well as protecting the civil service's merit system.

Pon is Trump's second nominee for OPM chief. In July, George Nesterchuk withdrew his nomination for the position after running into opposition from federal worker unions (*Greenwire*, Aug. 2).

The committee will also hear from Michael Rigas, Trump's nominee to be deputy director at OPM, and Emily Murphy, picked to be administrator of the General Services Administration.

Schedule: The hearing is Wednesday, Oct. 18, at 10 a.m. in 342 Dirksen.

Witnesses: Jeff Pon, Michael Rigas and Emily Murphy.

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

9. Interior quietly exploring Izembek land swap docs

Scott Streater, E&E News reporter

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The Interior Department is exploring a proposal to exchange two parcels owned by an Alaskan tribal corporation for lands within the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge that would be used to route a controversial gravel road through a wilderness area.

The latest proposal for the long-contested road through the refuge involves Interior orchestrating a land swap directly with King Cove Corp. It could entail swapping about 2,604 acres of land owned by the tribal corporation for an undisclosed number of acres of federal land needed to route the road through the wildlife refuge and connect the towns of King Cove and Cold Bay.

The land exchange proposal between Interior and King Cove Corp. was revealed in documents obtained by Defenders of Wildlife in a series of Freedom of Information Act requests to the Fish and Wildlife Service in July and August.

Defenders shared the **documents** it obtained with E&E News. *The Washington Post* first reported on the behind-the-scenes effort at Interior to approve a land swap.

The more than 600 documents obtained by Defenders, comprising thousands of pages, indicate that Interior is also exploring whether to simply convey the federal lands in the national wildlife refuge to King Cove Corp. Interior says in the documents it is legally authorized to conduct a land swap "with a native corp." under a provision in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

Defenders and many other environmental groups along with Democrats in Congress have long opposed the 11-mile-long, single-lane gravel road, saying it would cause irreparable harm to migratory birds and other wildlife and would set a precedent for opening up other wildlife refuges and wilderness areas to development.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has made the land exchange a top priority, according to the documents. Defenders pointed to a "Top 10 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Priorities" document that ranks the Izembek land exchange at No. 4 on the list.

Indeed, Interior directed FWS to explore "an administrative land exchange," and in June, the service granted the Alaska Department of Transportation a special-use permit to conduct surveys "for road routes" in the refuge, the documents show.

There's also evidence in the documents that Interior is working to keep the land exchange proposal quiet in an effort, according to Defenders, to "diminish" public involvement in the decisionmaking process.

In a June 20 note from an Izembek National Wildlife Refuge official detailing a telephone conversation with an Interior attorney, the refuge official wrote: "He indicated the Secretary would like to see folks on the ground doing the survey in the next couple days. He did not seem to [sic] excited about the direction that it was going out for public comment."

Jamie Rappaport Clark, Defenders' president and CEO, said the records are troubling.

"These records expose yet another of Secretary Zinke's secretive, backroom deals to sell off and sell out our public lands and wildlife. We will not stand by and watch while some of the most important wildlife habitat on the planet is sacrificed for surreptitious commercial interests," Clark said in a statement.

Clark, who led the Fish and Wildlife Service during the Clinton administration, added: "If this proposal, which reflects a terrible abuse of power, is successful in Izembek, then none of our public lands, waters and wildlife will be safe. If they can pull this off in Alaska, the entire Lower 48 is at risk."

Representatives with the Interior Department did not respond to a request for comment on this story.

But proponents of the road have long argued it is needed to provide King Cove residents with reliable access to medical care. Residents there currently must either ride an airplane or take a boat across a choppy bay to reach an all-weather airport in Cold Bay that can transport them to Anchorage.

The land exchange was included in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, pending review and approval by the Interior secretary.

But then-Interior Secretary Sally Jewell rejected the land exchange and the Izembek road in 2013 because she said it would fragment a crucial wetland and tarnish a formally designated wilderness area within the refuge.

The documents obtained by Defenders describe a "push" for the land exchange that originates from Zinke's office.

Dean Gould, president of King Cove Corp., first proposed the land exchange in a May 24 letter to Zinke.

"Constructing such a road will save the lives of our residents who continually require medical emergencies and need to be medevaced to Anchorage," Gould wrote. "This road will also provide a quality of life that our people deserve as Americans."

Gould wrote that 12 people have died "trying to get to and from the King Cove unpaved, gravel landing strip" at King Cove airport.

He also wrote that the 2,604 acres of King Cove Corp. land it is willing to swap with Interior is located between Kinzarof Lagoon and Cold Bay, and has been identified by FWS as "High Priority" land to be added to the Izembek and Alaska Peninsula national wildlife refuges.

Interior's latest moves to authorize the road come three months after the House approved H.R. 218, sponsored by Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), which would authorize the exchange of state land for 206 acres of federal land needed for the road (Greenwire, July 20).

The Senate version of Young's legislation is **S. 101**, sponsored by Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and fellow Alaska Sen. Dan Sullivan (R).

Murkowski has not even held a hearing on the bill in her Energy and Natural Resources Committee, though she has repeatedly brought up the need for the road at other hearings. A spokeswoman for the committee said in July that the senior Alaska senator would pursue a host of options to get the road built.

One such option is for the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee chaired by Murkowski to include approval of the Izembek road in the fiscal 2018 spending bill for U.S. EPA and Interior that is expected to be released this week (*E&E Daily*, Oct. 16).

<http://bit.ly/2zv6HkG>

10. Department set to announce forester as BIA head

Michael Doyle, E&E News reporter

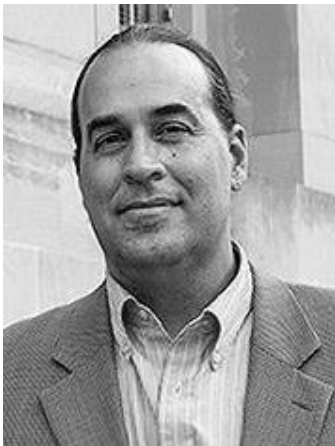
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The Interior Department today is expected to name wildland firefighter and seasoned federal administrator Bryan Rice as the new director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

A former Peace Corps volunteer and citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Rice most recently led Interior's Office of Wildland Fire.

"I'm continually talking to people," Rice said of his prior job in an interview earlier this year on Federal News Radio, specifically citing his ongoing conversations with "tribal governance, tribal council members [and] tribal forest program managers."

But Rice's expected new job, which has not yet been officially announced, will expose him to a different kind of heat. Numerous investigations from the Government Accountability Office and others have repeatedly identified BIA management challenges that span multiple administrations.



Bryan Rice. IBM Center for the The Business of Government

"GAO has found serious weaknesses in Indian Affairs' oversight of Indian education," the watchdog agency **reported** last month, adding that "BIA inefficiently managed Indian energy resources and the development process, thereby limiting opportunities for tribes and their members to use those resources to create economic benefits and improve the well-being of their communities."

BIA coordinates government-to-government relations with 567 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Its sometimes rocky inner workings have been of interest to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke since his time as a congressman from Montana.

"I look forward to representing the interests of our great nation and giving a voice to all Americans, to include our great Indian nations, on how we manage and sustain our public lands and treasures they contain," Zinke said during his Senate confirmation hearing.

At the same time, the Trump administration earlier this year proposed a \$2.5 billion budget for BIA, a \$303.3 million cut that officials said reflected the need to balance the budget. The bureau employs about 7,000 full-time workers.

Rice's appointment does not need Senate confirmation, making it an easier move for an Interior Department leadership that has struggled to fill other top slots.

No nominees have yet been named to head the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service or U.S. Geological Survey, all positions for which Senate confirmation is required.

Now a member of the Senior Executive Service, Rice began working for the federal government nearly 20 years ago as a member of the Helena Interagency Hotshot Crew for the Forest Service in Montana. He served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal, working in both community forestry and rural development.

Rice supervised numerous timber operations on the Yakama Indian Reservation and was a forester for the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. Rice also served in leadership capacities internationally in Tanzania, Mexico, Brazil and Australia for both Interior and the Forest Service.

Rice previously served as deputy director for the BIA Office of Trust Services from 2011 to 2014, and as director of forest management in the Forest Service from 2014 to 2016. He has testified before Congress several times, which is likely to be useful experience in his BIA job.

"The cumulative impacts of drought, invasive species and climate variability are creating a landscape more susceptible to devastating wildland fires," Rice told the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in August.

Rice holds a forestry degree from the University of Illinois, from which he graduated in 1995, and earned a Master of Business Administration from the University of Alaska Southeast.

Last month, John Tahsuda III, a member of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, was named Interior's principal deputy assistant secretary for Indian affairs.

<http://bit.ly/2yp0fel>