

For Immediate Release

Date: February 26, 2018

Re: Zinke's One Year Anniversary: Promises Abandoned

March 1, 2018, will mark one year since Ryan Zinke was sworn in as U.S. Secretary of the Interior. A year ago at his confirmation hearing, commitments were made to protect public lands, respect tribal sovereignty, and follow the footsteps of conservation-minded President Theodore Roosevelt. Unfortunately, Secretary Zinke's promises have been far from kept.

Sportsmen, hunters, faith-based groups, athletes, the outdoor recreation industry, and conservationists agree: Secretary Zinke is not the man Representative Zinke held himself out to be. Long gone are the days when he stood up for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and against efforts to privatize public lands. One need only look at the President's FY19 budget to observe that the Secretary has turned his back on the public lands and waters, pledges and stakeholders he used as backdrop during his confirmation.

Year in Review

From revoking protections for national monuments such as the Bears Ears national monument and undermining the five sovereign tribal nations who see that land as sacred, to walking back critical environmental policies and regulations governing energy development on public lands and waters, to putting the entire Outer Continental Shelf on the auction block despite data (and nearly every coastal state leader) arguing that some areas are ill-advised, [Secretary Zinke's first-year](#) has been a disaster.

The following memo provides a short summary and quote from one of the many groups that have come together - some unlikely allies - in the work to prevent Secretary Zinke from continuing to undermine Interior's mission to be stewards of our public lands and waters:

- Opening **National Monuments** up for Extraction and Looting
- Selling Off **Public Lands** to Highest Bidder
- **The Arctic**: "Open for Business"
- Exposing **Offshore U.S.** to Untested, Unregulated Activities

Opening National Monuments up for Extraction and Looting

Acting upon Secretary Zinke's recommendation, in December President Trump removed protections for more than two million acres of public lands in the American West. His attack on Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments amounts to the largest elimination of protected areas in U.S. history. The action – which puts Native American sacred sites, red rock canyons, and paleontological resources at renewed risk of looting and destruction – is deeply unpopular and un-American. It is also illegal: Trump was immediately challenged in court by five Native American nations, as well as Patagonia, the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, and conservation groups. Zinke's [report](#) to the White House puts at least 8 more national monuments in the crosshairs, meaning that tens of millions more acres of public lands and oceans could soon be sold out for mining, drilling, industrial-scale commercial fishing, and logging. The Trump Administration's expected attacks on marine national monuments, in particular, could eliminate nearly half of all U.S. ocean areas that are fully protected from commercial use.

Quote from Kate Kelly, Public Lands Director for the Center for American Progress:

“Overwhelmingly, Americans want public lands preserved for future generations. By eliminating vast areas of national monuments, the Trump administration has made it possible for these public lands to be sold out to speculators and private developers. We need our leaders to protect our national monuments, national parks and other public lands so that Americans now and in the future continue to have access to these irreplaceable places.” *Contact:*

kpkelly@americanprogress.org

Selling Off Public Lands to Highest Bidder

Secretary Zinke has overseen a sweeping giveaway of our public lands to the oil and gas industry in his first year. Throughout 2017, the Secretary used taxpayer resources to undertake an inventory of any policy that could be construed as a “burden” to energy development. This included policies that protect public health, communities and the environment. Under Zinke’s leadership, things such as clean water and clean air are nothing more than a burden to be done away with. In a sweeping move, Interior has scrapped a series of reforms put in place in 2010 meant to increase planning and public engagement. This included the Master Leasing Plan policy, which focused on landscape-level planning to identify conflicts early and involve the local community in how their public lands were managed. The Department has also proposed a new rule that would effectively eliminate the existing Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Methane Waste and Prevention Rule. With this action, the BLM is trying to allow companies to burn off excess methane instead of requiring them to capture it, costing taxpayers enormous sums of money. The Department is also attempting to undo sage grouse plans across the West. These plans have undergone an unprecedented amount of involvement from the public and state and are widely supported by western officials from both parties.

Quote from Jenny Kordick, Advocacy Director for Energy and Climate for The Wilderness

Society: “Secretary Zinke has shown time and again that he only cares about the oil and gas industry at the expense of our health and climate. At the same time he is propping up dirty energy, making it harder to develop renewable energy by cutting program budgets and even suggesting that solar is not a good use of our public lands.” *Contact:* jenny.kordick@tws.org

The Arctic: “Open for Business”

On the last day of May 2017, Secretary Zinke stood before an Alaska Oil and Gas Association conference and declared Alaska “open for business.” Surrounded by oil industry executives, he signed Secretarial Order 3352, calling for a new assessment of oil and gas beneath the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northeast Alaska and the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska in the northwest. For the Arctic Refuge, the announcement confirmed that Zinke and the Trump administration have the Coastal Plain — a pristine region and vibrant nursery for caribou, denning polar bears and countless migratory birds — squarely in their sights. And for the broader Arctic, it foreshadowed the all-out attack on our public lands and waters that was to come.

In December, BLM offered the largest lease sale in Reserve history with more than 10 million acres on the block, including sensitive wildlife habitat surrounding the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area – one of the largest and most ecologically significant wetland areas in the world. And in January 2018, Secretary Zinke signed a land-swap agreement to allow a small, remote Alaska town to construct a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, a vast wilderness area that has been protected for decades.

Quote from Adam Kolton, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League: “One year in, and what we have seen from Secretary Zinke – a self-proclaimed Teddy Roosevelt conservative – is nothing short of an all-out attack on Alaska and the Arctic. None of Alaska’s iconic public lands and waters are safe from the Trump administration and the Zinke-led Interior Department. He has moved to undo decision after decision – sometimes illegally, and often behind closed doors – that took years to make following a thorough public review and input from Alaska Natives, sportsmen and hundreds of thousands of Americans. Make no mistake: Secretary Zinke’s actions are putting Alaska’s cherished landscapes at greater risk than at any time since Captain Hazelwood ran the Exxon Valdez aground in Prince William Sound.” *Contact:* corey@alaskawild.org

Exposing Offshore U.S. to Untested, Unregulated Activities

Last April, the Trump administration launched its assault on our public oceans and coastal communities with the “America-First Offshore Energy Strategy,” which directed various agencies to expand offshore oil and gas exploration and drilling while weakening safety regulations. Pursuant to this strategy, Secretary Zinke unveiled a plan to open over 90 percent of federal offshore waters to new oil and gas development, with 47 lease sales proposed from 2019-2024. This is the single largest expansion of offshore drilling activity ever proposed, and is of particular concern given the simultaneous efforts to roll back offshore drilling safety regulations. Last December, Secretary Zinke authorized the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement to revise the oil and gas production safety systems and well control rules, enacted in the wake of the BP *Deepwater Horizon* oil disaster, and halted a study aimed to help the Bureau improve the effectiveness of its oversight and inspections of offshore oil and gas drilling operations. In addition, Secretary Zinke has expedited consideration of permits for the incidental take of marine mammals in order to fast-track seismic survey applications, reduced royalty rates for shallow-water leases in the Gulf of Mexico to encourage drilling, weakened financial assurances for decommissioning offshore infrastructure, and published a new regulation to extend offshore leases for companies conducting operations to an entire year.

Quote from Marissa Knodel, Associate Legislative Counsel, Earthjustice: “The administration’s offshore energy strategy is an extreme assault on our public oceans and presents unacceptable risks to our coastal communities, marine life and climate. Drilling threatens to coat our beaches with oil spills, pollute our air and water, decimate fisheries, and exacerbate climate disruption. The nation can meet its energy needs and grow jobs by investing in clean, renewable domestic sources like wind and solar. Secretary Zinke should heed the will of the majority of American people who want their oceans and coasts preserved and protected, not sold off to the highest corporate bidder.” *Contact:* mknodel@earthjustice.org

###