

**Committee on Natural Resources
Oversight Hearing
1324 Longworth House Office Building
March 27, 2019
10:00 am**

Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva Opening Statement

- If taken seriously, the FY2020 Budget Proposal for the Department of the Interior would devastate the Department, its workforce, and the special places it was created to protect.
- It proposes a 14% cut for Interior at a time when the Department is in desperate need of more funding.
- DOI lacks funding and staff to keep up with significant backlogs, including long overdue repairs at beloved National Parks, long lists of species at risk for extinction awaiting basic protections, overdue projects to address water supply shortages, and desperately needed repairs for schools serving indigenous families.
- This budget request seeks radical reductions to land acquisition programs, effectively ending the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a program that was just permanently authorized, with overwhelming, bipartisan support.
- It proposes to slash the Fish and Wildlife Service's budget by 16%, which would dramatically compromise their ability to help endangered species recover.

- The Bureau of Land Management would take a 10% hit overall, but somehow still give significant increases to coal management and to speed up oil and gas permitting.
- Probably the most destructive part of this budget is this administration's ongoing climate denial.
- With 25% of this country's emissions coming from public lands, we need real leadership from Interior. Instead, we are faced with proposals like a 77% cut to core climate science programs at the U.S. Geological Survey and zeroing out funding to help indigenous peoples prepare for the worst that climate change will bring.
- These devastating cuts would come at a time of uncertainty, chaos, and vulnerability for the Department.
- Before resigning only a few months ago, former Secretary Zinke wreaked havoc at Interior.
- He racked up nearly 20 federal investigations. At least four are still pending. Two have reportedly been sent to the Justice Department, indicating possible criminal violations.
- He conducted the widely-opposed and illegal rescission of national monuments. He started the expansion of offshore drilling despite bipartisan opposition. He launched an unprofessional Departmental reorganization, and accelerated already declining morale across the Department.
- Acting Secretary Bernhardt has a chance to right the ship. But early signs are troubling.

- The only possible remedy for the harm done to the Department over the last two years is a renewed commitment to absolute transparency, full cooperation with Congress, and investments in rooting out conflicts of interest and profiteering.
- Neither the priorities set forth in this budget request, or Acting Secretary Bernhardt's behavior so far, gives any indication things are going to change, and in fact, seems to indicate the Department may continue with big business as usual.
- My colleagues across the aisle have suggested that the solution to the crisis at the Interior Department is to create new accounting schemes to give the appearance that Congress is addressing these shortfalls. Of course, these schemes come with massive, mandatory price-tags, which my colleagues have no plan to pay for.
- That is not the answer. The answer is for Congress to make those who profit from our public lands and resources pay their fair share for that privilege. The answer is to increase appropriated funding for the Department and its agencies. The answer is to invest in an infrastructure package that fixes the decaying roads and bridges on federal lands.
- We need to find the courage to invest in the future of our public lands and resources, not simply try to hide or paper over the mess.
- I appreciate both of our witnesses for taking the time to be here and hope you can help us understand how this budget would serve the American people.

- And I look forward to having Mr. Bernhardt before this Committee in the very near future to continue this discussion.
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