

President Donald Trump's public lands budget request to help Oil & Gas programs

Adrian Hedden, Carlsbad Current-Argus Published 11:27 a.m. MT Feb. 12, 2020

A budget proposal made by U.S. President Donald Trump to fund the federal Bureau of Land Management was met with scorn from environmental and activist groups for perceived threats the proposed budget could pose to the environment.

Trump requested \$1.2 billion to fund the BLM in fiscal year 2021, with \$199.3 million earmarked for the agency's Energy and Minerals programs, as fossil fuels and renewable energy generated the highest revenue of all uses of BLM-owned land.

About \$139 million will fund the BLM's oil and gas programs, read a news release, while \$29.5 million was appropriated for renewable energy to support wind, solar and geothermal energy development.

Another \$18.9 million would go to coal management programs, and \$11.8 million was requested to support the mining of other minerals such as precious metals, phosphates, sand and gravel.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt said the proposal would support the BLM's efforts to diversify public land usage, encouraging continued mineral development while expanding outdoor recreation opportunities.

"President Trump's 2021 budget request for the Department is about investing in our people and public lands and waters," Bernhardt said.

"He is committed to the mission of conservation and creating more public access for Americans to fully enjoy our national treasures and landscapes. This budget is a critical step in the right direction and provides a path to restore commonsense in our budgeting process."

More: [Protests mount against U.S. Bureau of Land Management's land sale to oil and gas industry](#)

Bernhardt signed a secretarial order in March 2019, which implemented the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation act.

The move established numerous special recreation and conservation designations, while also specifying several land lease sales to be held on BLM land.



Watson Hopper President Finn Smith (left) meets with Acting U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt and workers at the plant, Feb. 6, 2019 in Hobbs.

Acting U.S. Interior Secretary David Bernhardt visits Hobbs

About \$59 million was requested for recreation resources management and another \$37.6 million was for the National Monuments and National Conservation Areas programs.

“These areas, protected by Congress and by Presidential proclamation, play an important role in providing outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities, including hunting and fishing, and support local economies and job opportunities in many rural western communities,” read a BLM statement.

“National Conservation Lands connect youth, veterans, and families to the outdoors through programs and recreational opportunities including internships for students, youth and veteran employment and training, and volunteer service.”

More: [New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham: Permian Basin oil and gas a main driver for policy](#)

But Phil Francis, chair of the Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks pointed to \$581 million in cuts to the National Park Service included in the request and a 97 percent decrease in funding to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

Francis said the proposed budget was part of a pattern seeing the Trump administration in making cuts to the NPS and other conservation efforts.

“Once again this year, President Trump’s proposed budget is a threat to the continued protection and preservation of our national parks and public lands,” Francis said. “It is ill-informed, irresponsible, and exactly what we’ve come to expect from this administration.”

National parks already faced continued decreases in federal appropriations, Francis said, and the continued cuts “undermined” its ability to protect public land.

More: [Artesia's Navajo Refinery listed among nation's most benzene polluting oil and gas sites](#)

“National parks are already suffering due to decreased annual appropriations in the past decade. Despite high visitation, staffing numbers continue to decline, placing our treasured natural and cultural resources at risk,” he said.

“Without appropriate levels of funding, it is impossible to effectively manage high visitation and ensure the protection of our parks. And this proposed budget would further reduce NPS staffing levels.”

More: [Carlsbad leaders demand state support as community struggles to adapt to oil and gas boom](#)

“Make no mistake, with these cuts the Trump Administration and Secretary Bernhardt would rob our communities and put our most iconic landscapes and waterways on the chopping block to make space for backroom deals to sell-off public lands to oil and natural gas executives,” he said.

“Hopefully this budget will be dead on arrival when it reaches Congress.”

Brent Bolin, political director at the Clean Water Fund said cuts to the Land and Water Conservation Fund could result in less funding for local communities and less support for their public lands.

“There is a deep history of support of the Land and Water Conservation Fund from Americans on both sides of the aisle because investing in communities and our public lands is good for our country,” Bolin said. “But President Trump and his political appointees at the Department of Interior, specifically Secretary Bernhardt, clearly don’t share in this vision and are willing to sacrifice our lands and put communities at risk.”

“Congress must reject this budget and fully and permanently fund the LWCF, a crucial government program that keeps our wild spaces and cultural heritage intact while ensuring that the American people have access to clean drinking water and public lands that benefit everyone.”

Adrian Hedden can be reached at 575-628-5516, achedden@currentargus.com or @AdrianHedden on Twitter.