



# The Mountain Pact

## October Conservation Update

As we transition into fall and swing into the October Congressional recess, below is a broad update on federal news relating to conservation, public lands, and climate change.

Public lands and environmental protections have been consistently under attack during the Trump administration's tenure. In the last two months, the Trump administration has announced a plan that would repeal the Methane Waste Prevention Rule; repealed wetland protections put in place in the 2015 Clean Water Rule; started a legal battle with California by revoking the state's vehicle emissions standards waiver; and put limits on the ability of National Park superintendents to submit public comments to other parts of the federal government regarding oil and gas development.



Each of these actions are detrimental to America's conservation legacy and are moving forward because of the people appointed to fill key roles within the Trump administration. People such as top Department of Interior (DOI) Lawyer Daniel Jorjani; Acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and self-described Sage-brush Rebel William Perry Pendley; and President Trump's pick to lead the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) who has ties to anti-animal protection groups Aurelia Skipwith.

- Despite pushback from many oil and gas companies, the Trump administration released a proposal in late August that will **roll back 2015 protections limiting methane in the atmosphere**. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas that is leaked, vented, and flared rather than captured and sold during the oil and gas drilling process. This rollback is bad for the environment and costs taxpayers.
- In mid-September, **the Trump administration repealed an Obama-era rule that increased protections for small streams and wetlands in the United States**. These small waterways make up 30 percent of America's drinking water. The new Trump administration rule drastically reduces the meaning of "Waters of the United States" allowing unregulated pollution in many US waterways.
- In mid-September, the Trump administration announced that they would be

[revoking California's waiver to set stricter fuel emissions standards](#) - a move that furthers the Trump administration's attempts to repeal Obama-era fuel efficiency standards. The announcement triggered a huge legal battle as **23 state attorneys general filed lawsuits against the Trump administration**. Days after the announcement, Trump's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [filed a hypocritical letter](#) attacking California's air quality and threatening to withhold highway funds - claiming poor air quality at the same time as removing tools California is using to improve air quality.

- In mid-August, **the National Park Service (NPS)** acting deputy director David Vela [issued a memo](#) requiring the superintendents of each national park to [go through Washington](#) when submitting comments regarding the possible impacts of oil and gas development close to park boundaries. This is seen by many as an attempt to quiet regional employees that oppose development championed by the Trump administration.
- Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee [announced a proposed funding level](#) of \$465 million for Fiscal Year 2020 for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The House proposed \$524 million. **This is dramatically under the \$900 Million funding level LWCF should receive.**
- In late September, **the Senate confirmed Daniel Jorjani, a former attorney for the Koch brothers, as DOI's new Solicitor General with a 51-43 vote despite the ongoing investigation into whether Jorjani lied to Congress about his involvement in crafting a new Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)**. DOI's process for reviewing documents allows political appointees to review the requests and even withhold documents, unnecessarily slowing down the process and even corrupting it. [When questioned about his involvement](#) in FOIA reviews, Jorjani denied he reviewed any requests - a claim accepted as false which remains under investigation.
- In early September, **a Senate committee approved President Trump's nominee to lead the USFWS**. However, sources have found that **Aurelia Skipwith has troubling ties with groups who are against endangered species protection. Skipwith was previously employed by the agrochemical giant Monsanto**, whose pesticides are known to harm bees. Additionally, Skipwith's fiancé [lobbied for Westlands Water District](#), a former client of Secretary Bernhardt, to reduce fish and wildlife protections.
- **William Perry Pendley, a well-known anti-public lands activist, has been serving as the acting director of the BLM and will now continue to do so through at least January 3**. His appointment was set to [expire on September 30](#), and numerous conservation groups, [as well as 12 Senators](#), urged Secretary Bernhardt to not renew Pendley's position as acting director. [Speculation has now increased](#) that President Trump plans to nominate Pendley for a Congressionally confirmed position leading the BLM. Pendley recently released the list of former clients that he must recuse himself from dealing with, a list totaling [17 pages](#) and including numerous clients.

