



The Mountain Pact

Secretary Bernhardt's Ethics Recusal Set to Expire August 3

Through various actions, the Department of Interior (DOI) has been working to advance extractive industry interests on public lands. The department has had a unilateral interest in 'energy dominance' and has made many decisions to advance this agenda because of, and through, ties between DOI leadership and industry.



Secretary Bernhardt's Conflicts of Interest

Concerns have been raised about Secretary of Interior David Bernhardt's conflicts of interest since he first accepted the position of Deputy Secretary in August 2017 as he was employed as a lobbyist in the oil and agriculture sectors immediately prior to starting at Interior. The potential conflicts of interest became even more concerning when Secretary Bernhardt was nominated to fill the Secretary position after Ryan Zinke resigned (amidst ethics violations of his own).

Per President Trump's order that all cabinet members recuse themselves from dealings with former clients, Secretary Bernhardt signed an [ethics agreement](#) where he recused himself from interactions and meetings with 22 of his former clients - the recusal period ends this week - on August 3, 2019.

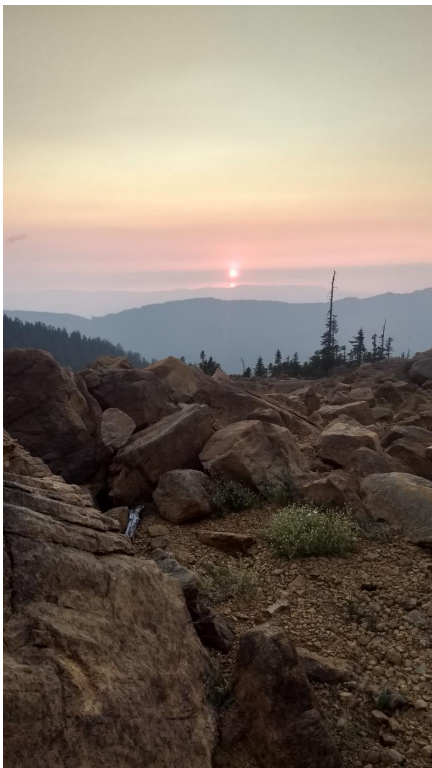
However, despite his recusal, Secretary Bernhardt has been found to have [violated this agreement](#) on [multiple occasions](#). Here are just some of the many instances where Secretary Bernhardt has seemingly ignored his recusal period and [held off the books meetings](#):

- Secretary Bernhardt was charged with overseeing the revision of the Sage-Grouse management plans -- these finalized plans would [remove protections](#) from 9 million acres of sensitive habitat. Four of Secretary Bernhardt's former clients, all whom constitute conflicts of interest, [benefit from the rollbacks](#) -- one of which joined a thank you letter to the then Deputy Secretary for his efforts that benefited industry.
- Just three months after his appointment as Deputy Secretary, Eni Petroleum, a company on Secretary Bernhardt's "do not contact list", [was approved](#) for a permit to drill in federal Arctic waters, becoming the first company to receive a drilling permit since 2015.

- Secretary Bernhardt has been instrumental in moving along controversial water projects -- one of which benefited the Westlands Water District. In a [perplexing series of events](#), Secretary Bernhardt's recusal from dealings with this former client ended August 2, 2018, one year earlier than the two-year period required by President Trump.
- As Deputy Secretary, Bernhardt [held an off the books meeting](#) with an Arizona developer following a decision by a top BLM field supervisor that a development would cause harm to threatened and endangered species. Following this meeting, the field supervisor was pressured by top DOI officials to reverse his decision.

Additionally, DOI left the national parks open during the 35-day government shutdown, a decision that [added billions of dollars](#) to the already extensive maintenance backlog deficit. The parks were open but unstaffed leading to illegal camping and disposal of waste. [Several parks closed their gates](#) when [impacts from human waste](#) started to threaten the environment. Even while the parks were open and unstaffed, Secretary Bernhardt kept 800 oil permitting staff on the clock and [73 of the 100](#) permits issued during this time period were to companies with ties to Secretary Bernhardt.

Along with the blatant favoritism in public lands decision-making towards industry, Secretary Bernhardt has also worked to suppress science. In [one instance](#) he blocked the release of a report that said two chemicals threatened the existence of 1,200 endangered species. Then Deputy Secretary Bernhardt advised Fish and Wildlife Service employees to take a different approach to reviewing chemical impacts to threatened and endangered species. The new approach had been lobbied for extensively by the chemical producers Dow AgroSciences and FMC Corporation along with other chemical manufacturers. Records show contact between the chemical industry and DOI officials, and show that David Bernhardt was involved with writing the letter stating that the report was not ready to be released.



Bureau of Land Management Leadership and Reorganization

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is housed within DOI, and since 2016, has had a rotating cycle of leadership and "acting directors", without an officially confirmed agency head. [Recently](#), an outspoken advocate for the sale of federal lands was named Deputy Director of Policy and Programs, and has [since been named](#) the next in a series of "acting directors". Prior to his position at BLM, William Perry Pendly, a self-proclaimed 'sagebrush rebel,' was the president of a conservative law firm that specializes in fighting against environmental lawsuits.

This news comes at the same time as an [announcement](#) that the BLM will move its headquarters to Grand Junction, CO, while scattering other top officials around offices in the rest of the 11 western states. Former BLM directors say that this move will disconnect

BLM officials from Washington and make it easier to sell off federal public lands to states, something William Perry Pendly has been publicly supportive of.

Why This Matters to Your Community

Secretary Bernhardt has proven time and time again that his former clients, particularly those in the energy sector, are more important than maintaining America's public lands for all Americans. With so many instances of the Secretary's former clients benefitting even while he was meant to be recused from those dealings do not bode well for reducing industry influence over DOI on August 3rd once the recusal expires. It seems likely that with new BLM leadership and organization our public lands will be further at risk of exploitation for industry gain.

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