

The Gazette

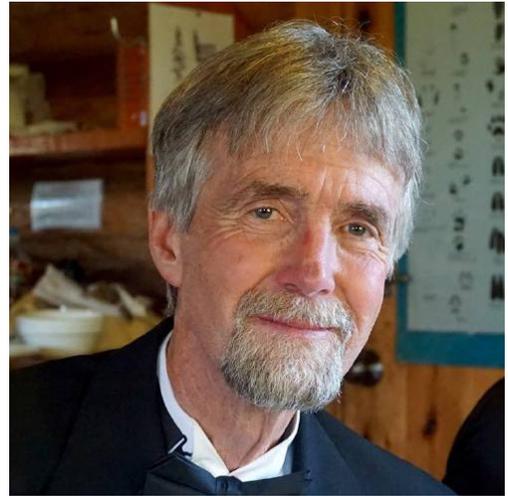
PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING JOURNALISM, EST. 1872

A threat to Colorado's precious quality of life

By: Todd Brown

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In just one year, the Trump administration and Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke have rolled back policies that ensured responsible management of our public lands, putting some of our most treasured landscapes at risk. The approach that Secretary Zinke is taking puts oil and gas development first and leaves communities like those in the Telluride region that depend on a balance of multiple uses - including recreation and conservation - on nearby public lands, behind in the dust.



Our region is home to approximately 2,400 residents and we receive nearly 700,000 visitors per year, who frequent local businesses, ski at Telluride Ski Resort and hike to Bridal Veil Falls. Why has input about the future of our people and public lands been ignored by this administration?

In ignoring its obligation to the American people - by sidestepping critical environmental review and completely stonewalling the public - the Bureau of Land Management is threatening the quality of the air we breathe, the water we drink, important wildlife habitats, and the outdoor recreational activities that are necessary for our communities to thrive.

This focus on 'energy dominance' and truncating the leasing process is a grave threat to significant revenue streams generated by hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation on public lands. The outdoor recreation industry accounts for an incredible 2 percent of the United States GDP, and in the Telluride region, tourism and recreational visits infuse \$1 billion annually and supports 4,000 jobs.

When Secretary Zinke is leasing oil and gas wells in our backyard, it threatens our whole way of life. The Southwest is a special place full of distinctive wildlife habitats, beautiful landscapes, and rich Native American history. As a longtime resident and the mayor pro tem of Telluride, I have grown to know and love the beautiful landscapes and rich cultural history of the nearby desert southwest.

The administration's removal of thousands of acres of land in Bears Ears National Monument from protected status was heartbreaking to those of us who understand the immeasurable value of that land. And the recent private leasing of lands near the boundaries of Bears Ears, Hovenweep, and Canyons of the Ancients National Monuments threaten these stunning, culturally important, and ecologically sensitive places.

The activities that take place on these landscapes must take into account the voices of the communities and broader public stakeholders who share a history and relation to these lands and rely on them to support their way of life. Not only should areas with cultural, archaeological, and geological significance be protected from oil and gas drilling, but lands that are leased should be done so at a price that ensures taxpayers receive their fair share of revenues generated from the publically owned resources. Current outdated leasing prices and royalty rates are extremely low relative to the true energy value, thus robbing Americans of their fair share of revenues.

Multiple use means balancing development with the many other benefits of our public lands.

We need a sweeping review of the oil and gas leasing process that factors in public values and prioritizes leasing in areas that will generate the most revenue for taxpayers, while not impairing other outdoor revenue-generating activities necessary for towns like Telluride to support local businesses, create jobs and thrive.

Todd Brown is a town councilman and mayor pro tem of the Town of Telluride. He is a graduate engineer from the Colorado School of Mines, with an MBA in finance from Washington University in St. Louis. He was an operations executive for Anheuser-Busch, Earthgrains, and Sara Lee and is working as a business coach for ASAP Accounting and Payroll, teaches skiing for Telluride Ski Resort, and volunteers for multiple nonprofit organizations in the Telluride region.