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The Coalition To Protect America's National Parks

Voices of Experience

October 17, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke, Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Subject: Executive Order 13792 (National Monument Review)

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We are writing to you on behalf of the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks (Coalition). With over 1,400 members, the Coalition is composed entirely of retired, former, or current employees of the National Park Service. Collectively our membership represents more than 35,000 years of experience managing and protecting America's most precious and important natural and historic places.

We, the undersigned, are extremely disappointed with the results of your review of our country's national monuments as part of implementation of Executive Order 13792. The Coalition actively participated in the public comment period and expressed strong objections to weakening protections on several occasions. We joined nearly 3 million people who spoke loudly in support of preserving these monuments and the values and economic and other benefits they represent. The results of your evaluation are directly counter to what the vast majority of commenters have called on you to do. This review has clearly been politically motivated and a monumental waste of government time and resources, especially when there are many other urgent issues facing our national parks and other public lands. Furthermore, the Interior Department's ongoing failure to release the report or provide supporting documentation for your recommendations to the public is utterly unconscionable given the administration's false allegations about the lack of transparency that occurred during the process that led to the creation of the monuments. All relevant information should be released to the public as soon as possible.

We join many others who strongly oppose your calling for the significant reduction or removal of protections for the natural and cultural resources, including many remarkable landscapes, currently protected in our national monuments. Given the rich history of conservation of public lands under the Antiquities Act of 1906 beginning with President Theodore Roosevelt, your determination that so many portions of existing national monuments do not meet the Act's requirements is unprecedented, arbitrary, and unlikely to withstand legal scrutiny. Federal courts have consistently deferred to the President's authority in establishing national monuments to use his discretion to determine "the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected" for "historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest."

The recommendations that we find most unacceptable include the following:

- **Bears Ears National Monument, Utah:** Shrink (separate reports suggest by as much as 1 million acres) the national monument and allow ‘traditional’ uses like mining, logging and drilling in protected areas.
- **Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Utah:** Shrink the national monument and allow ‘traditional’ uses like mining, logging and drilling in protected areas.
- **Cascade Siskiyou National Monument, Oregon:** Shrink the national monument and allow ‘traditional’ uses like mining, logging and drilling in protected areas.
- **Gold Butte National Monument, Nevada:** Shrink the national monument and allow ‘traditional’ uses like mining, logging and drilling in protected areas.
- **Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, New Mexico:** Allow ‘traditional’ uses like mining, logging and drilling in protected areas; leaves open the possibility of shrinking the monument.
- **Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, New Mexico:** Allow ‘traditional’ uses like mining, logging and drilling in protected areas; leaves open the possibility of shrinking the monument.
- **Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, Maine** - Suggests that logging should be allowed in the national monument; leaves open the possibility of shrinking the monument. The National Park Service already has all the authority it needs to protect and manage the natural resources of the monument. The recommendation to “promote healthy forests through active timber management” is misleading and, absent specific authorization by Congress, would likely be illegal under the laws that apply to this monument.
- **Northeast Canyons and Seamounts, Atlantic Ocean** - Allow industrial-scale commercial fishing in the national monument; leaves open the possibility of shrinking the monument.
- **Pacific Remote Islands National Monument, Pacific Ocean** –Allow industrial-scale commercial fishing in the national monument; leaves open the possibility of shrinking the monument.
- **Rose Atoll National Monument** - Allow industrial-scale commercial fishing in the national monument; leaves open the possibility of shrinking the monument.

At your confirmation hearing, you described yourself as “an unapologetic admirer of Teddy Roosevelt.” His conservation legacy is eloquently described on the Department’s own website at: <https://www.doi.gov/blog/theodore-roosevelts-legacy>. Your approach to the national monuments under review is antithetical to this conservation legacy and what President Roosevelt believed should be done for present and future generations.

In closing, we began this year with hope that the support you declared for public lands and outdoor recreation would, in fact, translate into greater conservation accomplishments during your tenure as Interior Secretary. Instead, your review of national monuments marks a dismal day in the history of public lands conservation in the United States.

Sincerely,

The Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks Executive Council:

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