

**To:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]; Russell Newell[russell\_newell@ios.doi.gov]; Laura Rigas[Laura\_Rigas@ios.doi.gov]; Eli Nachmany[eli\_nachmany@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Hinson, Alex  
**Sent:** 2017-09-11T16:38:45-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: DOI Daily Comms  
**Received:** 2017-09-11T16:45:40-04:00

Is this good to send?

On Mon, Sep 11, 2017 at 3:26 PM, Hinson, Alex <[alex\\_hinson@ios.doi.gov](mailto:alex_hinson@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

**INTERIOR**  
**WASHINGTON**  
9/11/2017

DAILY COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

TO: White House Cabinet Affairs Communications

FROM: Heather Swift & Laura Rigas

SUBJECT: Communications Update

**TV Hits:**

- [Fox News: Secretary Zinke joins 'Fox and Friends'](#)
- [Secretary Zinke gives remarks at Flight 93 National Memorial-Part 1](#)
- [Secretary Zinke gives remarks at Flight 93 National Memorial-Part 2](#)

**Press Inquiries:**

- Many small inquiries.
- **\*Double Inquiry\***-Politico (Ben Lefebvre) E&E News (Michael Doyle) - **REQUEST**— I just got this, that OIG is in the middle of inquiry into SES reassignments; sorry for last-minute, but would welcome comment. We are looking into the SES moves, but not the Joel Clement situation.--**RESPONSE**— Regarding the shuffling of SES at DOI: The President signed an executive order to reorganize the federal government for the future and the Secretary has been absolutely out front on that issue. In fact, he mentioned a Department-wide, front lines-focused reorganization on his first day address to all employees. The purpose of the Senior Executive Service is to ensure that the executive management of the government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the Nation and otherwise is of the highest quality. Senior executives are the highest paid employees in the federal government and signed up for the SES knowing that they could be called upon to work in different positions at any time. Congress meant for the SES to be a mobile force that are capable of taking on different assignments to meet the needs of the agency. Personnel moves among the Senior Executive Service are being conducted to better serve the taxpayer

and the Department's operations.

### **Top Stories**

- **Washington Examiner:** Fox News host asks Ryan Zinke if 9/11 memorials will be taken down next
- **Washington Times:** Ryan Zinke: Monuments shouldn't be taken down but learned from
- **E&E News:** IG looking into why senior staffers were moved
- **THE HILL:** GAO to investigate Zinke's alleged Alaskan threat: report
- **THE HILL:** Zinke on Irma: 'Leave no neighborhood behind'

### **Top Issues and Accomplishments**

- Interior continues to support all Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma efforts. All bureaus are executing their emergency plans and assisting in Hurricane relief.
- Today, Secretary Zinke was in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, for the dedication of the September 11<sup>th</sup> memorial where United flight 93 crashed.
- Secretary Zinke is also in NYC, where he did a live Fox and Friends hit and then participated in the Ground Zero September 11<sup>th</sup> memorial ceremony.
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Alex Hinson

Deputy Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
C: 202-641-5381

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**Cc:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]; Laura Rigas[Laura\_Rigas@ios.doi.gov]; Eli Nachmany[eli\_nachmany@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Russell Newell  
**Sent:** 2017-09-11T16:50:55-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: DOI Daily Comms  
**Received:** 2017-09-11T16:51:53-04:00

Looking now

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 11, 2017, at 4:38 PM, Hinson, Alex <[alex\\_hinson@ios.doi.gov](mailto:alex_hinson@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

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**To:** CabinetAffairs@who.eop.gov[CabinetAffairs@who.eop.gov]  
**From:** Domenech, Douglas  
**Sent:** 2017-09-12T13:58:37-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Interior Cabinet Affairs Report for 9/12/17  
**Received:** 2017-09-12T13:59:01-04:00  
[DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS 09-12-17.docx](#)

Attached and copied below.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS – 9/12/17**

Doug Domenech, Senior Advisor  
Lori Mashburn, White House Liaison

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**Status of the Secretary**

TODAY: The Secretary is in New York City.  
Tour Fort Wadsworth (Gateway National Recreation Area).  
Tour of Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site.  
Tour of the Statue of Liberty.

**THIS WEEK:**

9/13; Fox Studios NYC; Depart en route Washington, DC;  
Remarks at Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation Annual Banquet VIP Reception and Banquet, Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill, 400 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C.  
9/14: Meeting with Secretary Paulson; HOLD: White House Historical Association Dinner  
9/15: Meeting with the Republic of the Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine; Meeting with Alaska Federation of Natives; Revenue Comparison Analysis Model Meeting; Call with Governor Walker (3pm Eastern/11 am Alaska); Call with Chairman Murkowski; Call w/Rep. Don Young;

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**Status of the Deputy Secretary**

TODAY: The Deputy Secretary is in Washington, DC.  
9/13: Regulatory Reform Task Force Meeting; Meeting with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Board Members; Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation 28th Annual Banquet & Auction

**Media TODAY**

**INTERIOR DEPARTMENT SUPPORTS WHITE HOUSE, FEMA AND GOVERNOR'S EMERGENCY EFFORTS IN THE HURRICANE-BATTERED U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**

WASHINGTON – The Department of the Interior is expediting all possible support and assistance to the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) and FEMA in the wake of destruction from Hurricane Irma.

FEMA continues to coordinate the efforts of Interior and others in the federal family to support territorial, tribal, local, private-sector, and non-profit partners to address the catastrophic impacts of Hurricane Irma—on the islands as well as the mainland.

“The Department of the Interior actions in the USVI are part of our responsibility for federal policy related to the U.S. territories,” said U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke. “We commend the cooperative actions of the White House, USVI government, FEMA and the whole federal family to provide urgent relief to the Virgin Islands.”

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**WH COMMS REPORT** (new report filed Monday.)**TV Hits:**

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- Secretary Zinke is also in NYC today and tomorrow.
- PLANNED MEDIA while in NYC - Fox and Friends, Sirius XM Radio, Varney and Co.

**AGENCY MEDIA****National Park Service**

- September TBD: NPS National Release: NPS announcement of annual Rutgers report on NPS Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program economic impact. Tax credits 2016 contributed \$12.3 billion in output to the U.S. economy, added \$6.2 billion in GDP. Historic preservation tax incentives encourage investments in historic preservation and revitalization of communities small and large across the country.

**Bureau of Land Management**

- September 12: Local BLM Release: BLM-NV will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for three parcels totaling 3,680 acres in Nye County, NV. The sale is not expected to be controversial. Bidding is not expected to be robust.
- September 12: Local BLM Release: BLM-UT will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for 15 parcels totaling 4,438 acres in Juab County, UT. The sale is not expected to be controversial. Bidding is not expected to be robust.
- September 12: Local BLM Release: BLM-MT will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for one parcel in Dunn County, ND totaling 2.78 acres and 14 parcels in Fall River County, SD totaling 4,275.29 acres. The sale is not expected to be controversial. Bidding is not expected to be robust.

**Bureau of Reclamation**

- September TBD: National BOEM Release: Gulf G&G PEIS Record of Decision.
- September TBD: National BOEM Release: BOEM will announce Marine Minerals Rule.

**UPCOMING OIL AND GAS SALES**

- Nevada. On September 12, BLM-NV will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for three parcels totaling 3,680 acres in Nye County, NV.
- Utah. On September 12, BLM-UT will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for 15 parcels totaling 4,438 acres in Juab County, UT.

- **CONGRESSIONAL** (no change)

Wednesday, September 13, 2017

2:30pm: Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Oversight Hearing on High Risk Indian Programs: Progress and Efforts in Addressing GAO's Recommendations - Bureau of Indian Education and Bureau of Indian Affairs Energy Program.

Witnesses: Tony Dearman, Director, BIE; Mike Black, Acting Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs

Thursday, September 14, 2017

9:30am: Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Business Meeting to consider the nominations of Mr. Ryan Nelston to be Solicitor of the Interior, Mr. Joseph Balash to be Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management, and Mr. Richard Glick and Mr. Kevin McIntyre to be Members of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

**Political Appointee Update** (no change)

DOI politicals on board = 55

5 nominated awaiting confirmation:

Pending Senate floor vote: Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary Policy Management and Budget.

Pending Senate floor vote: Brenda Berman, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation.

Pending Senate floor vote: Doug Domenech, Assistant Secretary Insular Areas.

Pending Senate Committee Vote (T) 9/14: Joe Balash, Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals.

Pending Senate Committee Vote (T) 9/14: Ryan Douglas Nelson, Solicitor.

- Overall:

Schedule C: 31 of 68 onboard; 4 in process

NC-SES: 20 of 44 onboard; 1 starting; 7 in process  
PAS: 5 of 17 Announced; 15 of 17 Submitted to PPO

-  
**Secretary Speaking Invitations** (some changes)

Accepted

9/13 - Congressional Sportsmen Foundation reception (DC)

9/20-21 - Ribbon Cutting, Wonders of Wildlife Museum & Aquarium Bass Pro HQ  
(Springfield, MO)

9/22-24 - NRA Women's Leadership Forum Summit (Dallas, TX)

9/25 - Remarks at National Stone Sand and Gravel Association Legislative and Policy Forum  
(DC)

9/26 - Jefferson's Islands Club Citizen of the Year Award (DC)

9/27-28 - Cohen Veterans Care Summit (DC)

Outstanding Invitations in Process

9/18 – Concordia Annual Summit (NYC)

9/23 - Southern Illinois Hunting & Fishing Days Inc. (Carterville, IL)

9/25 – National Petroleum Council

9/26 – National Clean Energy Week Symposium (DC)

Open - Detroit Economic Club

Open - Americans for Tax Reform (DC)

Open - Weyrich Lunch (DC)

Declining

9/10-13 - Annual Mtg of the Assoc of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Snowbird, UT)

9/12 - Conference on Transportation Needs of National Parks and Public Lands (DC)

9/12 - Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative Annual Meeting (St. Louis, MO)

9/17 - 150th Anniversary for the Antietam National Cemetery (Antietam)

- 9/19-21 - Montana Wood Products Assn - Forest Resources Association Convention (Whitefish, MT)
- 9/20 – Remarks to the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (DC)
- 9/21 - Associated Industries of Florida (AIF) (DC)
- 9/23 - Buffalo Bill Centennial Ball (Cody, Wyoming)
- 9/23 - National Mining Hall of Fame (Denver, CO)
- 9/26 - Billings Chamber Annual Mtg (Billings, MT)
- 9/26 - S&P Annual Asia Pacific Petroleum Conference (Singapore)
- 9/26 - GAO for international conference on extractive industries (DC)
- 9/28-30 - Council for National Policy
- 10/1-3 - New Mexico Oil and Gas Association (Santa Fe)
- 10/2 - IOGCC Annual Meeting (Pittsburgh PA)
- 10-16-17 Americans For Tax Reform Coalition Leaders Summit (Miami Beach, FL)
- 10/13 - Public Land & Resources Law Review's Public Land Law Conference (Missoula, MT)

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**Emergency Management** (new)

As of 5:00 a.m. EDT, Post-Tropical Cyclone Irma was located about 65 miles southwest of Atlanta, Georgia. Irma has been moving northwestward through the southeastern U.S. and this motion is expected to continue and approach the Tennessee Valley by this afternoon. Irma will continue to weaken throughout the day. Maximum sustained winds have decreased to near 15 miles per hour (mph) with higher gusts. Additional weakening is forecast, and Irma is expected to weaken to a tropical storm this morning and a tropical depression this afternoon. Irma has a very large wind field. Remnant bands from Irma are expected to produce additional rain accumulations of 1 to 3 inches with isolated amounts up to 5 inches today across northern South Carolina. Localized intense rainfall rates will lead to additional isolated areas of flash flooding and rapid rises in creeks, streams, and rivers. An additional 1 to 2 inches of rainfall is expected across northern Mississippi, northwestern Alabama, eastern Arkansas, western Tennessee, and western Kentucky.

Flash Flood watches are in effect for portions of the southern Appalachians. Flood Warnings and Advisories are ongoing throughout the Southeast.

**Irma impacts:**

The Department of Homeland Security is reporting that Irma is responsible for 9 deaths in its wake; seven confirmed in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, and two unconfirmed deaths in Florida. Two healthcare facilities are reported closed, and six are operating on emergency power. Five

thousand service members aboard two Navy ships have been deployed to the Caribbean to aid in the movement of personnel and supplies. There have been over 700 people evacuated from the area. A chartered Delta Airlines flight evacuated 149 Americans from St. Thomas to Detroit, Michigan.

In Florida, air terminals have begun delivering fuel in the state, but shortages at gas stations continue. Fuel shortages could worsen if Port Everglades does not reopen soon.

Six hospitals in Georgia have been evacuated and five hospitals have sheltered in place with 571 occupants.

No Incident Support Bases (ISB) or Federal Staging Areas are reporting damage, although some ISBs experienced tropical storm force winds. Maxwell ISB was closed, but is expected to resume operations on today.

FEMA reports that more than half of the total customers in Florida are without power. Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Alabama are beginning to see outages as Irma progresses northward. Puerto Rico has a mutual aid request for assistance in restoring power to Department of Energy. There is no estimate for power restoration on St. Thomas or St. John. Work continues in St. Croix.

DOI currently has 209 personnel (no change) supporting 8 FEMA Mission Assignments (MA) in response to Irma.

With respect to internal bureau and office-specific Irma activities:

NPS reports that several parks in Florida are without power. Communications are down for landline and cellphones. Many of the park units will be inaccessible for a period of time. Employee safety and accountability within the impacted parks remains the top priority for the NPS. Mobilization efforts by the Eastern Incident Management Team (IMT) continued in Atlanta on Monday. A total of 70 resources have been ordered to assist with recovery operations in the Hurricane Irma-affected south Florida and Caribbean national parks, 20 of which have checked in at the incident, with the remainder en route. Resources to provide peer support for employees and damage assessments are beginning to reach the Caribbean parks branch. The advance team departed for south Florida to begin preparations for the arrival of the remaining team members. They were to stage overnight in Jacksonville, arriving at Homestead today to coordinate with Everglades staff and scout locations for the incident command post. The remainder of the team will travel south on Wednesday morning.

In the Virgin Islands National Park area, transportation issues on and off the island delayed IMT support scheduled to arrive on the island yesterday. Department of Defense and United States Coast Guard assets are providing support by water and air. Personnel are assisting two employees arrange for government housing after their own homes were damaged.

Big Cypress National Preserve (BICY) remains closed. There are reports of park staff having lost homes. BICY law enforcement rangers, weather and safety conditions permitting, will work in conjunction with Collier County EMS/LEO/SAR to begin damage assessments. All other employees in affected areas have been instructed to remain sheltered. Damages to NPS facilities and preserve resources are unknown. The Staff at Chokoloskee experienced powerful tidal surges.

Fort Pulaski (FOPU) remains closed. The Bull River and FOPU bridges need to be assessed before

access to the park can be accomplished to assess damages.

Cumberland Island/Fort Frederica (CUIS/FOFR) remains closed. The park docks on St. Marys waterfront and the park concession marina east of the park service docks where concession ferries dock sustained severe damage. A GSA-leased warehouse with NPS property sustained major damage.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) reports that they have 74 stations closed at this time, 58 stations are due to Hurricane Irma. The USFWS IMT is scheduled to travel this morning. An additional Saw Team Task Force is being considered for deployment. The North Mississippi Task Force deployed yesterday and is planning to begin assessment and recovery operations upon arrival. The USFWS Special Operations Response Team (SORT) has created three teams and will begin initial assessments on the eastern coast of Florida. The teams will assist with accounting for staff and damage assessments in the affected areas. A support helicopter, currently located in Denver, has been released in support of recovery operations and should be able to make it as far as Louisiana before tonight.

While damage to the Florida Keys refuges is likely substantial, assessments cannot be conducted due to the lack of access.

BIA reports that the Seminole Tribe of Florida is operating 4 shelters with a total population of 39 members. The Immokalee, Big Cypress, Brighton, and Hollywood Reservations are without power. A generator failure at the tribal hospital caused the loss of some of the temperature-controlled medications. A request to Indian Health Services has been submitted to supplement the stock of prescription medications. The tribe is working with FEMA for repair or replacement of the generator. Initial damage assessments have indicated minimal to moderate damages to the reservations. Door-to-door damage assessments will begin today. The Miccosukee Tribe of Indians reports approximately six inches of standing water over roads and continues to wait for dewatering pumps. The equipment is ready for shipment and will be en route as soon as transportation routes are cleared. There is no cell phone service or power, and a generator at the shelter is out. Additionally, it is being reported that the Tribe is running low on diesel fuel. A Senior Center is providing food for tribal members and first responders. Initial damage assessments will start soon. The Poarch Band of Creek Indians was included in approved Emergency Declaration for the State of Florida.

OCIO reports 41 sites without network services due to Hurricane Irma.

#### Hurricane Harvey Response/Recovery Operations:

DOI currently maintains 55 personnel supporting interagency Mission Assignments in support of Harvey response and recovery activity.

In support of ESF #5, Information and Planning, 31 USGS personnel from Texas, Arizona, Oklahoma, and New Mexico continue work. Five hundred forty-two (542) high water marks (HWMs) have been flagged, and 240 HWMs have been surveyed. Four personnel from Louisiana were also in the field conducting work.

Internally, the USGS Texas Water Science Center (TXWSC) has 13 personnel from Texas and Connecticut making discharge measurements, taking water quality samples, and repairing gages. There are currently five streamgages that are damaged or not reporting.

OCIO reports that two DOI sites remain without network services in the Harvey recovery zone.

Wildland Fire:

The Sprague Fire in Glacier National Park, MT, (NPS) has burned 14,432 (+721) acres and is 47 (no change)-percent contained. The fire is managed by a Type-2 IMT with 152 (-3) personnel assigned, including 63 (-1) DOI personnel. There are 238 (no change) residential structures threatened. Fire behavior was described as active during this reporting period with torching, backing, and spotting. The fire constitutes significant economic impacts, as a large area closure in addition to the Evacuation Order along the historic Going-To-The-Sun Road corridor affects residents, the Xanterra concessionaire, the Sperry Chalet concessionaire, Bus and Tour concessionaires, Swan Mountain Outfitters, Glacier Park Inc., and gateway communities like West Glacier due to the loss of park visitation.

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**Outside Media of Interest** (new)

**Pence: Flight 93 Passengers Might Have Saved My Life On 9/11.**

The AP (9/11, Mandak) reports that Vice President Pence addressed relatives and friends of the victims of United Flight 93 at Shanksville, Pennsylvania's Flight 93 National Memorial in a memorial service Monday morning. In a solemn and at times emotional speech before about 1,000 spectators, Pence praised the Flight 93 passengers' heroism and said that their actions "might well have saved his life." Pence "said he was in Washington as a member of Congress on 9/11, and learned that the Capitol was a possible target of the hijacked plane, which was only 12 minutes away." "It was the longest 12 minutes of my life," Pence said.

**Zinke On Irma: 'Leave No Neighborhood Behind'.**

The Hill (9/11, Savransky) reports that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke on Monday "said it's important no neighborhood is forgotten in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma." On Fox News, Zinke discussed the "devastation" in the territories, highlighting the damage in the Virgin Islands. Zinke said, "But certainly, the president's focus is leave no neighborhood behind."

**Wonders Of Wildlife Announces Grand Opening Events Schedule Celebrating Conservation.**

The Webster County (MO) Citizen (9/11) reports that Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium on Monday "announced details for its grand opening celebrations including a historic event welcoming the most significant gathering of prominent North American conservation leaders and influencers ever assembled in our nation's history." Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke will be among the "featured guests" at the grand opening celebrations which kick off Wednesday, September 20.

**Land Of Many Uses Or No Uses?**

In a piece for Forbes (9/11, Flows), Terry Anderson, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and at the Property and Environment Research Center in Bozeman, MT, writes that "instead of letting professionals manage our lands and our wildlife, environmental groups want to create de facto wilderness areas where backpackers displace loggers, ranchers, and miners." Anderson urges Congress to "go to work reforming legislation in ways that return land management to federal and state professionals." He suggests that "a starting point would be to require approval by state congressional delegations of any national monument designated in their state."

**Logging Is Necessary For Katahdin Woods And Waters' Future Sustainability.**

In an op-ed for the Bangor (ME) Daily News (9/11, Doran), Dana Doran, executive director of the

Professional Logging Contractors of Maine, writes that “as debate continues over the future of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, the myth that active timber harvesting within its boundaries would be a bad thing is being repeated too often for professionals in the logging industry to ignore.” Doran asserts that “logging is not only necessary for the monument, but is just what it requires to achieve long-term sustainability.” Doran argues that “a forest that is not managed with responsible timber harvesting eventually becomes overgrown and ultimately succumbs to insects, disease and quite often fire.”

#### **Environmental Groups’ Lawsuit Challenges Sale Of Oil And Gas Leases.**

The Las Vegas Review-Journal (9/11, Whaley) reports that “two environmental groups on Monday filed a lawsuit challenging the Bureau of Land Management’s June sale of oil and gas leases in Northern Nevada.” On June 14, the BLM “offered nearly 200,000 acres of public lands in Nevada’s Battle Mountain district for fossil fuel development, including hydraulic fracturing.” The lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club “argues the BLM failed to consider the potential consequences of oil drilling in the area, from contamination of critical desert water sources to emission of climate-altering greenhouse gases.”

#### **Cheney Votes Against Ban On Wild Horse Slaughter As Wyoming Herds Grow.**

The Casper (WY) Star-Tribune (9/11, Rosenfeld) reports that Rep. Liz Cheney is “backing the Trump administration’s request to allow the slaughtering of wild horses for meat in order to control growing herds.” Cheney “voted against a measure last week that would have barred the Bureau of Land Management from killing healthy horses or selling them to be slaughtered.” Cheney said in a statement, “The BLM has failed for many years to effectively manage these horses. Their population has exploded causing extension ecological damage to Wyoming land and resources, threatening our livestock and resulting in unsustainable conditions for the horses.”

#### **BLM Gets \$34 Million In Revenue From Eddy County Lease Sales.**

The Carlsbad (NM) Current-Argus (9/11) reports that “more than 4,000 acres of federal land in Eddy County were leased in a quarterly sale that netted the Bureau of Land Management over \$34 million.” In all, “over 15,000 acres — or 62 parcels — in six New Mexico counties were leased in the Sept. 7 sale.” The sale “brought in a total of \$130 million, that federal and state officials said is further proof of the promise of the Permian Basin.”

#### **Wanted: Volunteer Shooters To Thin Grand Canyon Bison Herd.**

The AP (9/11, Fonseca) reports that the National Park Service “plans to thin a herd of bison in the Grand Canyon through roundups and by seeking volunteers who are physically fit and proficient with a gun to kill the animals that increasingly are damaging park resources.” According to the article, “about 600 of the animals now live in the region, and biologists say the bison numbers could hit 1,500 within 10 years if left uncontrolled.” The NPS “gave final approval to the bison reduction plan this month.”

#### **Secretary Ryan Zinke Talks Hurricane Irma, 9/11.**

On Fox News (9/11), Interior Secretary joined ‘Fox & Friends’ from Shanksville, Pennsylvania to talk about rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Irma. Zinke also discussed 9/11 and the Flight 93 memorial.

#### **Federal Register Listings: (new)**

Items cleared for the FR on Monday.

REG0007381 NPS National Register of Historic Places, August 19, 2017. The NPS is soliciting comments on the significance of properties nominated before August 19, 2017, for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or related actions. Notice 09/11/2017.

REG0007376 OS Statement of Findings: Aamodt Litigation Settlement Act. This is a Statement of Findings required by the Aamodt Litigation Settlement Act (Act) enacted in 2010 as part of Title VI of the Claims Resolution Act. The Statement of Findings that nine conditions precedent have been met must be published by September 15, 2017, for the Aamodt Settlement Agreement to be fully enforceable and for waivers to vest. Notice 09/11/2017.

Doug Domenech  
Senior Advisor  
US Department of the Interior

*NOTE: Every email I send or receive is subject to release under the Freedom of Information Act.*

**To:** Scott Hommel[scott\_hommel@ios.doi.gov]; Magallanes, Downey[downey\_magallanes@ios.doi.gov]; Laura Rigas[laura\_rigas@ios.doi.gov]; Swift, Heather[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]; James Cason[james\_cason@ios.doi.gov]; Micah Chambers[micah\_chambers@ios.doi.gov]; Daniel Jorjani[daniel\_jorjani@ios.doi.gov]; Mashburn, Lori[lori\_mashburn@ios.doi.gov]; Bauserman, Christine[christine\_bauserman@ios.doi.gov]; Caroline Boulton[caroline\_boulton@ios.doi.gov]; Thiele, Aaron[aaron\_thiele@ios.doi.gov]; Willens, Todd[todd\_willens@ios.doi.gov]; Getto, Leila[leila\_getto@ios.doi.gov]; David Bernhardt[(b)(6)@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Domenech, Douglas  
**Sent:** 2017-09-12T13:59:51-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Interior Cabinet Affairs Report for 9/12/17  
**Received:** 2017-09-12T14:00:20-04:00  
[DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS 09-12-17.docx](#)

Attached and copied below.

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS – 9/12/17**

Doug Domenech, Senior Advisor  
Lori Mashburn, White House Liaison

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**Status of the Secretary**

TODAY: The Secretary is in New York City.  
Tour Fort Wadsworth (Gateway National Recreation Area).  
Tour of Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site.  
Tour of the Statue of Liberty.

THIS WEEK:

9/13; Fox Studios NYC; Depart en route Washington, DC;  
Remarks at Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation Annual Banquet VIP Reception and Banquet, Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill, 400 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C.  
9/14: Meeting with Secretary Paulson; HOLD: White House Historical Association Dinner  
9/15: Meeting with the Republic of the Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine; Meeting with Alaska Federation of Natives; Revenue Comparison Analysis Model Meeting; Call with Governor Walker (3pm Eastern/11 am Alaska); Call with Chairman Murkowski; Call w/Rep. Don Young;

-

**Status of the Deputy Secretary**

TODAY: The Deputy Secretary is in Washington, DC.  
9/13: Regulatory Reform Task Force Meeting; Meeting with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Board Members; Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation 28th Annual Banquet & Auction

**Media TODAY**

**INTERIOR DEPARTMENT SUPPORTS WHITE HOUSE, FEMA AND GOVERNOR'S EMERGENCY EFFORTS IN THE HURRICANE-BATTERED U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**

WASHINGTON – The Department of the Interior is expediting all possible support and assistance to the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) and FEMA in the wake of destruction from Hurricane Irma.

FEMA continues to coordinate the efforts of Interior and others in the federal family to support territorial, tribal, local, private-sector, and non-profit partners to address the catastrophic impacts of Hurricane Irma—on the islands as well as the mainland.

“The Department of the Interior actions in the USVI are part of our responsibility for federal policy related to the U.S. territories,” said U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke. “We commend the cooperative actions of the White House, USVI government, FEMA and the whole federal family to provide urgent relief to the Virgin Islands.”

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**WH COMMS REPORT** (new report filed Monday.)

**TV Hits:**

- Fox News: Secretary Zinke joins 'Fox and Friends'
- Secretary Zinke gives remarks at Flight 93 National Memorial-Part 1
- Secretary Zinke gives remarks at Flight 93 National Memorial-Part 2

**Press Inquiries:**

- Many small inquiries.
- \*Double Inquiry\*-Politico (Ben Lefebvre) E&E News (Michael Doyle) - REQUEST— I just got this, that OIG is in the middle of inquiry into SES reassignments; sorry for last-minute, but would welcome comment. We are looking into the SES moves, but not the Joel Clement situation.--  
 RESPONSE— Regarding the shuffling of SES at DOI: The President signed an executive order to reorganize the federal government for the future and the Secretary has been absolutely out front on that issue. In fact, he mentioned a Department-wide, front lines-focused reorganization on his first day address to all employees. The purpose of the Senior Executive Service is to ensure that the executive management of the government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the Nation and otherwise is of the highest quality. Senior executives are the highest paid employees in the federal government and signed up for the SES knowing that they could be called upon to work in different positions at any time. Congress meant for the SES to be a mobile force that are capable of taking on different assignments to meet the needs of the agency. Personnel moves among the Senior Executive Service are being conducted to better serve the taxpayer and the Department's operations.

**Top Stories**

- Washington Examiner: Fox News host asks Ryan Zinke if 9/11 memorials will be taken down next
- Washington Times: Ryan Zinke: Monuments shouldn't be taken down but learned from
- E&E News: IG looking into why senior staffers were moved
- THE HILL: GAO to investigate Zinke's alleged Alaskan threat: report
- THE HILL: Zinke on Irma: 'Leave no neighborhood behind'

**Top Issues and Accomplishments**

- Interior continues to support all Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma efforts. All bureaus are executing their emergency plans and assisting in Hurricane relief.
- Today, Secretary Zinke was in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, for the dedication of the September 11th memorial where United flight 93 crashed. Secretary Zinke did a live Fox and Friends hit from the site of Flight 93, and then participated in a September 11th memorial ceremony with Vice President Pence.
- Secretary Zinke is also in NYC today and tomorrow.
- PLANNED MEDIA while in NYC - Fox and Friends, Sirius XM Radio, Varney and Co.

**AGENCY MEDIA**

**National Park Service**

- September TBD: NPS National Release: NPS announcement of annual Rutgers report on NPS Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program economic impact. Tax credits 2016 contributed \$12.3 billion in output to the U.S. economy, added \$6.2 billion in GDP. Historic preservation tax incentives encourage investments in historic preservation and revitalization of communities small and large across the country.

**Bureau of Land Management**

- September 12: Local BLM Release: BLM-NV will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for three parcels totaling 3,680 acres in Nye County, NV. The sale is not expected to be controversial. Bidding is not expected to be robust.
- September 12: Local BLM Release: BLM-UT will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for 15 parcels totaling 4,438 acres in Juab County, UT. The sale is not expected to be controversial. Bidding is not expected to be robust.
- September 12: Local BLM Release: BLM-MT will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for one parcel in Dunn County, ND totaling 2.78 acres and 14 parcels in Fall River County, SD totaling 4,275.29 acres. The sale is not expected to be controversial. Bidding is not expected to be robust.

**Bureau of Reclamation**

- September TBD: National BOEM Release: Gulf G&G PEIS Record of Decision.
- September TBD: National BOEM Release: BOEM will announce Marine Minerals Rule.

**UPCOMING OIL AND GAS SALES**

- Nevada. On September 12, BLM-NV will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for three parcels totaling 3,680 acres in Nye County, NV.
- Utah. On September 12, BLM-UT will hold an online oil and gas lease sale for 15 parcels totaling 4,438 acres in Juab County, UT.

**CONGRESSIONAL** (no change)

Wednesday, September 13, 2017

2:30pm: Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Oversight Hearing on High Risk Indian Programs: Progress and Efforts in Addressing GAO's Recommendations - Bureau of Indian Education and Bureau of Indian Affairs Energy Program.  
Witnesses: Tony Dearman, Director, BIE; Mike Black, Acting Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs

Thursday, September 14, 2017

9:30am: Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Business Meeting to consider the nominations of Mr. Ryan Nelston to be Solicitor of the Interior, Mr. Joseph Balash to be Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management, and Mr. Richard Glick and Mr. Kevin McIntyre to be Members of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

**Political Appointee Update** (no change)

DOI politicals on board = 55

5 nominated awaiting confirmation:

Pending Senate floor vote: Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary Policy Management and Budget.

Pending Senate floor vote: Brenda Berman, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation.

Pending Senate floor vote: Doug Domenech, Assistant Secretary Insular Areas.  
Pending Senate Committee Vote (T) 9/14: Joe Balash, Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals.  
Pending Senate Committee Vote (T) 9/14: Ryan Douglas Nelson, Solicitor.

-  
Overall:  
Schedule C: 31 of 68 onboard; 4 in process  
NC-SES: 20 of 44 onboard; 1 starting; 7 in process  
PAS: 5 of 17 Announced; 15 of 17 Submitted to PPO

-  
**Secretary Speaking Invitations** (some changes)

**Accepted**

9/13 - Congressional Sportsmen Foundation reception (DC)  
9/20-21 - Ribbon Cutting, Wonders of Wildlife Museum & Aquarium Bass Pro HQ  
(Springfield, MO)  
9/22-24 - NRA Women's Leadership Forum Summit (Dallas, TX)  
9/25 - Remarks at National Stone Sand and Gravel Association Legislative and Policy Forum  
(DC)  
9/26 - Jefferson's Islands Club Citizen of the Year Award (DC)  
9/27-28 - Cohen Veterans Care Summit (DC)

**Outstanding Invitations in Process**

9/18 – Concordia Annual Summit (NYC)  
9/23 - Southern Illinois Hunting & Fishing Days Inc. (Carterville, IL)  
9/25 – National Petroleum Council  
9/26 – National Clean Energy Week Symposium (DC)  
Open - Detroit Economic Club  
Open - Americans for Tax Reform (DC)  
Open - Weyrich Lunch (DC)

**Declining**

- 9/10-13 - Annual Mtg of the Assoc of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Snowbird, UT)
- 9/12 - Conference on Transportation Needs of National Parks and Public Lands (DC)
- 9/12 - Mississippi River Cities & Towns Initiative Annual Meeting (St. Louis, MO)
- 9/17 - 150th Anniversary for the Antietam National Cemetery (Antietam)
- 9/19-21 - Montana Wood Products Assn - Forest Resources Association Convention (Whitefish, MT)
- 9/20 – Remarks to the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (DC)
- 9/21 - Associated Industries of Florida (AIF) (DC)
- 9/23 - Buffalo Bill Centennial Ball (Cody, Wyoming)
- 9/23 - National Mining Hall of Fame (Denver, CO)
- 9/26 - Billings Chamber Annual Mtg (Billings, MT)
- 9/26 - S&P Annual Asia Pacific Petroleum Conference (Singapore)
- 9/26 - GAO for international conference on extractive industries (DC)
- 9/28-30 - Council for National Policy
- 10/1-3 - New Mexico Oil and Gas Association (Santa Fe)
- 10/2 - IOGCC Annual Meeting (Pittsburgh PA)
- 10-16-17 Americans For Tax Reform Coalition Leaders Summit (Miami Beach, FL)
- 10/13 - Public Land & Resources Law Review's Public Land Law Conference (Missoula, MT)

-  
**Emergency Management** (new)

As of 5:00 a.m. EDT, Post-Tropical Cyclone Irma was located about 65 miles southwest of Atlanta, Georgia. Irma has been moving northwestward through the southeastern U.S. and this motion is expected to continue and approach the Tennessee Valley by this afternoon. Irma will continue to weaken throughout the day. Maximum sustained winds have decreased to near 15 miles per hour (mph) with higher gusts. Additional weakening is forecast, and Irma is expected to weaken to a tropical storm this morning and a tropical depression this afternoon. Irma has a very large wind field. Remnant bands from Irma are expected to produce additional rain accumulations of 1 to 3 inches with isolated amounts up to 5 inches today across northern South Carolina. Localized intense rainfall rates will lead to additional isolated areas of flash flooding and rapid rises in creeks, streams, and rivers. An additional 1 to 2 inches of rainfall is expected across northern Mississippi, northwestern Alabama, eastern Arkansas, western Tennessee, and western Kentucky.

Flash Flood watches are in effect for portions of the southern Appalachians. Flood Warnings and Advisories are ongoing throughout the Southeast.

**Irma impacts:**

The Department of Homeland Security is reporting that Irma is responsible for 9 deaths in its wake; seven confirmed in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, and two unconfirmed deaths in Florida. Two healthcare facilities are reported closed, and six are operating on emergency power. Five thousand service members aboard two Navy ships have been deployed to the Caribbean to aid in the movement of personnel and supplies. There have been over 700 people evacuated from the area. A chartered Delta Airlines flight evacuated 149 Americans from St. Thomas to Detroit, Michigan.

In Florida, air terminals have begun delivering fuel in the state, but shortages at gas stations continue. Fuel shortages could worsen if Port Everglades does not reopen soon.

Six hospitals in Georgia have been evacuated and five hospitals have sheltered in place with 571 occupants.

No Incident Support Bases (ISB) or Federal Staging Areas are reporting damage, although some ISBs experienced tropical storm force winds. Maxwell ISB was closed, but is expected to resume operations on today.

FEMA reports that more than half of the total customers in Florida are without power. Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Alabama are beginning to see outages as Irma progresses northward. Puerto Rico has a mutual aid request for assistance in restoring power to Department of Energy. There is no estimate for power restoration on St. Thomas or St. John. Work continues in St. Croix.

DOI currently has 209 personnel (no change) supporting 8 FEMA Mission Assignments (MA) in response to Irma.

With respect to internal bureau and office-specific Irma activities:

NPS reports that several parks in Florida are without power. Communications are down for landline and cellphones. Many of the park units will be inaccessible for a period of time. Employee safety and accountability within the impacted parks remains the top priority for the NPS. Mobilization efforts by the Eastern Incident Management Team (IMT) continued in Atlanta on Monday. A total of 70 resources have been ordered to assist with recovery operations in the Hurricane Irma-affected south Florida and Caribbean national parks, 20 of which have checked in at the incident, with the remainder en route. Resources to provide peer support for employees and damage assessments are beginning to reach the Caribbean parks branch. The advance team departed for south Florida to begin preparations for the arrival of the remaining team members. They were to stage overnight in Jacksonville, arriving at Homestead today to coordinate with Everglades staff and scout locations for the incident command post. The remainder of the team will travel south on Wednesday morning.

In the Virgin Islands National Park area, transportation issues on and off the island delayed IMT support scheduled to arrive on the island yesterday. Department of Defense and United States Coast Guard assets are providing support by water and air. Personnel are assisting two employees arrange for government housing after their own homes were damaged.

Big Cypress National Preserve (BICY) remains closed. There are reports of park staff having lost homes. BICY law enforcement rangers, weather and safety conditions permitting, will work in conjunction with Collier County EMS/LEO/SAR to begin damage assessments. All other employees in affected areas have been instructed to remain sheltered. Damages to NPS facilities and preserve resources are unknown. The Staff at Chokoloskee experienced powerful tidal surges.

Fort Pulaski (FOPU) remains closed. The Bull River and FOPU bridges need to be assessed before access to the park can be accomplished to assess damages.

Cumberland Island/Fort Frederica (CUIS/FOFR) remains closed. The park docks on St. Marys waterfront and the park concession marina east of the park service docks where concession ferries dock sustained severe damage. A GSA-leased warehouse with NPS property sustained major damage.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) reports that they have 74 stations closed at this time, 58 stations are due to Hurricane Irma. The USFWS IMT is scheduled to travel this morning. An additional Saw Team Task Force is being considered for deployment. The North Mississippi Task Force deployed yesterday and is planning to begin assessment and recovery operations upon arrival. The USFWS Special Operations Response Team (SORT) has created three teams and will begin initial assessments on the eastern coast of Florida. The teams will assist with accounting for staff and damage assessments in the affected areas. A support helicopter, currently located in Denver, has been released in support of recovery operations and should be able to make it as far as Louisiana before tonight.

While damage to the Florida Keys refuges is likely substantial, assessments cannot be conducted due to the lack of access.

BIA reports that the Seminole Tribe of Florida is operating 4 shelters with a total population of 39 members. The Immokalee, Big Cypress, Brighton, and Hollywood Reservations are without power. A generator failure at the tribal hospital caused the loss of some of the temperature-controlled medications. A request to Indian Health Services has been submitted to supplement the stock of prescription medications. The tribe is working with FEMA for repair or replacement of the generator. Initial damage assessments have indicated minimal to moderate damages to the reservations. Door-to-door damage assessments will begin today. The Miccosukee Tribe of Indians reports approximately six inches of standing water over roads and continues to wait for dewatering pumps. The equipment is ready for shipment and will be en route as soon as transportation routes are cleared. There is no cell phone service or power, and a generator at the shelter is out. Additionally, it is being reported that the Tribe is running low on diesel fuel. A Senior Center is providing food for tribal members and first responders. Initial damage assessments will start soon. The Poarch Band of Creek Indians was included in approved Emergency Declaration for the State of Florida.

OCIO reports 41 sites without network services due to Hurricane Irma.

Hurricane Harvey Response/Recovery Operations:

DOI currently maintains 55 personnel supporting interagency Mission Assignments in support of Harvey response and recovery activity.

In support of ESF #5, Information and Planning, 31 USGS personnel from Texas, Arizona, Oklahoma, and New Mexico continue work. Five hundred forty-two (542) high water marks (HWMs) have been flagged, and 240 HWMs have been surveyed. Four personnel from Louisiana were also in the field conducting work.

Internally, the USGS Texas Water Science Center (TXWSC) has 13 personnel from Texas and Connecticut making discharge measurements, taking water quality samples, and repairing gages. There are currently five streamgages that are damaged or not reporting.

OCIO reports that two DOI sites remain without network services in the Harvey recovery zone.

#### Wildland Fire:

The Sprague Fire in Glacier National Park, MT, (NPS) has burned 14,432 (+721) acres and is 47 (no change)-percent contained. The fire is managed by a Type-2 IMT with 152 (-3) personnel assigned, including 63 (-1) DOI personnel. There are 238 (no change) residential structures threatened. Fire behavior was described as active during this reporting period with torching, backing, and spotting. The fire constitutes significant economic impacts, as a large area closure in addition to the Evacuation Order along the historic Going-To-The-Sun Road corridor affects residents, the Xanterra concessionaire, the Sperry Chalet concessionaire, Bus and Tour concessionaires, Swan Mountain Outfitters, Glacier Park Inc., and gateway communities like West Glacier due to the loss of park visitation.

#### Outside Media of Interest (new)

##### **Pence: Flight 93 Passengers Might Have Saved My Life On 9/11.**

The AP (9/11, Mandak) reports that Vice President Pence addressed relatives and friends of the victims of United Flight 93 at Shanksville, Pennsylvania's Flight 93 National Memorial in a memorial service Monday morning. In a solemn and at times emotional speech before about 1,000 spectators, Pence praised the Flight 93 passengers' heroism and said that their actions "might well have saved his life." Pence "said he was in Washington as a member of Congress on 9/11, and learned that the Capitol was a possible target of the hijacked plane, which was only 12 minutes away." "It was the longest 12 minutes of my life," Pence said.

##### **Zinke On Irma: 'Leave No Neighborhood Behind'.**

The Hill (9/11, Savransky) reports that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke on Monday "said it's important no neighborhood is forgotten in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma." On Fox News, Zinke discussed the "devastation" in the territories, highlighting the damage in the Virgin Islands. Zinke said, "But certainly, the president's focus is leave no neighborhood behind."

##### **Wonders Of Wildlife Announces Grand Opening Events Schedule Celebrating Conservation.**

The Webster County (MO) Citizen (9/11) reports that Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium on Monday "announced details for its grand opening celebrations including a historic event welcoming the most significant gathering of prominent North American conservation leaders and influencers ever assembled in our nation's history." Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke will be among the "featured guests" at the grand opening celebrations which kick off Wednesday, September 20.

##### **Land Of Many Uses Or No Uses?**

In a piece for Forbes (9/11, Flows), Terry Anderson, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and at the Property and Environment Research Center in Bozeman, MT, writes that "instead of letting

professionals manage our lands and our wildlife, environmental groups want to create de facto wilderness areas where backpackers displace loggers, ranchers, and miners.” Anderson urges Congress to “go to work reforming legislation in ways that return land management to federal and state professionals.” He suggests that “a starting point would be to require approval by state congressional delegations of any national monument designated in their state.”

#### **Logging Is Necessary For Katahdin Woods And Waters’ Future Sustainability.**

In an op-ed for the Bangor (ME) Daily News (9/11, Doran), Dana Doran, executive director of the Professional Logging Contractors of Maine, writes that “as debate continues over the future of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, the myth that active timber harvesting within its boundaries would be a bad thing is being repeated too often for professionals in the logging industry to ignore.” Doran asserts that “logging is not only necessary for the monument, but is just what it requires to achieve long-term sustainability.” Doran argues that “a forest that is not managed with responsible timber harvesting eventually becomes overgrown and ultimately succumbs to insects, disease and quite often fire.”

#### **Environmental Groups’ Lawsuit Challenges Sale Of Oil And Gas Leases.**

The Las Vegas Review-Journal (9/11, Whaley) reports that “two environmental groups on Monday filed a lawsuit challenging the Bureau of Land Management’s June sale of oil and gas leases in Northern Nevada.” On June 14, the BLM “offered nearly 200,000 acres of public lands in Nevada’s Battle Mountain district for fossil fuel development, including hydraulic fracturing.” The lawsuit filed by the Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club “argues the BLM failed to consider the potential consequences of oil drilling in the area, from contamination of critical desert water sources to emission of climate-altering greenhouse gases.”

#### **Cheney Votes Against Ban On Wild Horse Slaughter As Wyoming Herds Grow.**

The Casper (WY) Star-Tribune (9/11, Rosenfeld) reports that Rep. Liz Cheney is “backing the Trump administration’s request to allow the slaughtering of wild horses for meat in order to control growing herds.” Cheney “voted against a measure last week that would have barred the Bureau of Land Management from killing healthy horses or selling them to be slaughtered.” Cheney said in a statement, “The BLM has failed for many years to effectively manage these horses. Their population has exploded causing extension ecological damage to Wyoming land and resources, threatening our livestock and resulting in unsustainable conditions for the horses.”

#### **BLM Gets \$34 Million In Revenue From Eddy County Lease Sales.**

The Carlsbad (NM) Current-Argus (9/11) reports that “more than 4,000 acres of federal land in Eddy County were leased in a quarterly sale that netted the Bureau of Land Management over \$34 million.” In all, “over 15,000 acres — or 62 parcels — in six New Mexico counties were leased in the Sept. 7 sale.” The sale “brought in a total of \$130 million, that federal and state officials said is further proof of the promise of the Permian Basin.”

#### **Wanted: Volunteer Shooters To Thin Grand Canyon Bison Herd.**

The AP (9/11, Fonseca) reports that the National Park Service “plans to thin a herd of bison in the Grand Canyon through roundups and by seeking volunteers who are physically fit and proficient with a gun to kill the animals that increasingly are damaging park resources.” According to the article, “about 600 of the animals now live in the region, and biologists say the bison numbers could hit 1,500 within 10 years if left uncontrolled.” The NPS “gave final approval to the bison reduction plan this month.”

**Secretary Ryan Zinke Talks Hurricane Irma, 9/11.**

On Fox News (9/11), Interior Secretary joined 'Fox & Friends' from Shanksville, Pennsylvania to talk about rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Irma. Zinke also discussed 9/11 and the Flight 93 memorial.

**Federal Register Listings:** (new)

Items cleared for the FR on Monday.

REG0007381 NPS National Register of Historic Places, August 19, 2017. The NPS is soliciting comments on the significance of properties nominated before August 19, 2017, for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or related actions. Notice 09/11/2017.

REG0007376 OS Statement of Findings: Aamodt Litigation Settlement Act. This is a Statement of Findings required by the Aamodt Litigation Settlement Act (Act) enacted in 2010 as part of Title VI of the Claims Resolution Act. The Statement of Findings that nine conditions precedent have been met must be published by September 15, 2017, for the Aamodt Settlement Agreement to be fully enforceable and for waivers to vest. Notice 09/11/2017.

Doug Domenech  
Senior Advisor  
US Department of the Interior

NOTE: *Every email I send or receive is subject to release under the Freedom of Information Act.*

**To:** Swift, Heather[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov];  
stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov[stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Nathaniel Herz  
**Sent:** 2017-09-12T20:41:03-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-12T20:50:01-04:00

Hi Heather (and Steve),

Wondering if it would be possible to talk with someone from DOI about some of the things we've seen reported and heard about when it comes to the department's efforts to help Alaska villages threatened by rising sea levels -- Newtok, Kivalina, Shishmaref and Shaktoolik. I've obviously read the stuff from Joel Clement about his reassignment and have talked to him directly, and his perspective is that the work the department was doing to help coordinate these villages moving out of harm's way has largely stopped.

Hoping to hear the department's perspective on these issues and to understand what it is or is not still doing to work with these villages. Could we set something up? Would like to get some on-record comments but also happy to hear from you guys on background as well. I'm hoping to finish a story by the end of the week.

Thanks,  
Nat  
907-793-0312

--

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**To:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]; Eli Nachmany[eli\_nachmany@ios.doi.gov]; Russell Newell[russell\_newell@ios.doi.gov]; Laura Rigas[Laura\_Rigas@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Hinson, Alex  
**Sent:** 2017-09-13T10:11:44-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** DRAFT- DOI Daily Report  
**Received:** 2017-09-13T10:11:51-04:00

## INTERIOR DAILY COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

### Top Stories

#### Virgin Islands Consortium: DEPT. OF INTERIOR EXPEDITES RELEASE OF \$223 MILLION IN ADVANCE PAYMENTS TO USVI IN WAKE OF IRMA

*“Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke announced on Friday that Interior will be expediting the rum-cover over advance payment of \$223,925,000 for estimated FY 2018 collections in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The move follows President Donald Trump’s Thursday approval and signing of a disaster declaration for the territory, which unlocks emergency federal funding for those affected by Hurricane Irma.”*

### TALKING POINTS

- The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and its bureaus have 209 personnel on mission assignments related to Hurricane Irma as of 9/13.
- Hurricane Irma has killed 19 total on the United States mainland (11) and the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands (4) and Puerto Rico (3).
- 430,000 people are without power in Puerto Rico, and 30,000 without power in the USVI.
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) staff have continued to provide advance support to FEMA and state partners with real-time field measurements and installing storm-tide sensors along the coasts of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

Many National Park Service units have been closed and hundreds of personnel are gearing up for damage assessment, debris removal and helping with search and rescue efforts in the region.

- The U.S. military is providing relief to the affected Islands, having C-17 planes deliver food and other necessities, as well as receiving aid from U.S. Navy ships.
- With at least 70 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service field stations closed, 18 refuges along Florida’s west coast, including Key West, J.N. “Ding” Darling and Crystal River, face particularly massive flooding and destructive winds.
- The Bureau of Indian Affairs is assisting the Miccosukee and Seminole tribes, who have lost power.

#### Washington Times: Zinke moves to fight wildfires by clearing trees in break with hands-off forestry policy

*“Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke moved Tuesday to combat the spread of catastrophic wildfires by clearing more trees, a policy switch that represents a dramatic departure from nearly three decades of hands-off management in the federal forests. He released a department-wide memo calling on supervisors and managers to “think about fire in a new and aggressive way” by clearing the dead and dying trees and vegetation that have overrun the federal forests and heightened wildfire danger.”*

## TALKING POINTS

- Secretary Zinke grew up in the heart of America's timberlands in Montana - currently home to some of the strongest and deadliest wildfires this season.
- Secretary Zinke's directive applies to all land management bureaus and services within the department that have burnable vegetation.
- The directive is aimed at restoring proven forest management and preemptive fuels reduction practices in order to help prevent catastrophic wildfires.
- Dead and dying timber from previous fires and disease infestation plagues our forests and makes them more prone to catastrophic fires. By thinning these fuels, fires do not gain in intensity and grow as quickly. This makes them safer and more manageable to battle.
- The Trump Administration is taking aggressive and preemptive measures to prevent wildfires and combat their spread through active fuels management versus the previous administration's more "naturalist" approach. The naturalist approach allowed fuels to build up and forests to thicken, making them more prone to wildfires that are more difficult and dangerous to suppress.
- The directive also orders bureaus and services to protect structures and assets like visitors centers, lodges, and infrastructure by thinning the urban-wildland interface.
- This order does not allow commercial timber harvests in National Parks. It does however order preemptive fuels management, like what already happens in parks like Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park.

### Washington Post: Interior's 'unusual' transfer of senior executives spurs official probe

*"The Interior Department's Office of Inspector General (OIG) is examining the extraordinary and politically suspect reassignment of dozens of Senior Executive Service (SES) members. The OIG's review is in response to a request from eight Democrats on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. They asked for the probe after one Interior senior executive, Joel Clement, wrote a Washington Post article that said he was reassigned and "retaliated against for speaking out publicly about the dangers that climate change poses to Alaska Native communities."*

- **Regarding the shuffling of SES at DOI:** The President signed an executive order to reorganize the federal government for the future and the Secretary has been absolutely out front on that issue. In fact, he mentioned a Department-wide, front lines-focused reorganization on his first day address to all employees. The purpose of the Senior Executive Service is to ensure that the executive management of the government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the Nation and otherwise is of the highest quality. Senior executives are the highest paid employees in the federal government and signed up for the SES knowing that they could be called upon to work in different positions at any time. Congress meant for the SES to be a mobile force that are capable of taking on different assignments to meet the needs of the agency. Personnel moves among the Senior Executive Service are being conducted to better serve the taxpayer and the Department's operations.

**THE HILL-Opinion: No, President Trump, national monuments are not a ‘land grab’**

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Alex Hinson

Deputy Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
C: 202-641-5381

**To:** Hinson, Alex[alex\_hinson@ios.doi.gov]  
**Cc:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]; Eli Nachmany[eli\_nachmany@ios.doi.gov]; Russell Newell[russell\_newell@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Laura Rigas  
**Sent:** 2017-09-13T13:01:16-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: DRAFT- DOI Daily Report  
**Received:** 2017-09-13T13:02:03-04:00

Hey. Did this go out?

Laura Keehner Rigas  
Communications Director  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
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**Cc:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]; Eli Nachmany[eli\_nachmany@ios.doi.gov]; Russell Newell[russell\_newell@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Hinson, Alex  
**Sent:** 2017-09-13T13:06:07-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: DRAFT- DOI Daily Report  
**Received:** 2017-09-13T13:06:46-04:00

Not yet, waiting on approval.

On Wed, Sep 13, 2017 at 1:01 PM, Laura Rigas <laura\_rigas@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

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Laura Keehner Rigas  
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**To:** Hinson, Alex[alex\_hinson@ios.doi.gov]  
**Cc:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]; Russell Newell[russell\_newell@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Laura Rigas  
**Sent:** 2017-09-13T13:29:03-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: DRAFT- DOI Daily Report  
**Received:** 2017-09-13T13:36:35-04:00

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As for this entry, I'm fine with it as long as the talkers have already been approved.

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Laura Keehner Rigas  
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Alex Hinson

Deputy Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
C: 202-641-5381

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Alex Hinson

Deputy Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
C: 202-641-5381

**To:** Hinson, Alex[alex\_hinson@ios.doi.gov]  
**Cc:** Laura Rigas[laura\_rigas@ios.doi.gov]; Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]; Eli Nachmany[eli\_nachmany@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Newell, Russell  
**Sent:** 2017-09-13T14:27:57-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: DRAFT- DOI Daily Report  
**Received:** 2017-09-13T14:29:00-04:00

good here if the Irma numbers are the latest.

Russell Newell  
Deputy Director of Communications  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
(202) 208-6232  
@Interior

On Wed, Sep 13, 2017 at 1:06 PM, Hinson, Alex <alex\_hinson@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

Not yet, waiting on approval.

On Wed, Sep 13, 2017 at 1:01 PM, Laura Rigas <laura\_rigas@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

Hey. Did this go out?

Laura Keehner Rigas  
Communications Director  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
(202) 897-7022 cell  
@Interior

On Sep 13, 2017, at 10:11 AM, Hinson, Alex <alex\_hinson@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

## **INTERIOR DAILY COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

### **Top Stories**

#### **Virgin Islands Consortium: DEPT. OF INTERIOR EXPEDITES RELEASE OF \$223 MILLION IN ADVANCE PAYMENTS TO USVI IN WAKE OF IRMA**

*“Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke announced on Friday that Interior will be expediting the rum-cover over advance payment of \$223,925,000 for estimated FY 2018 collections in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The move follows President Donald Trump’s Thursday approval and signing of a disaster declaration for the territory, which unlocks emergency federal funding for those affected by Hurricane Irma.”*

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- The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and its bureaus have 209 personnel on mission assignments related to Hurricane Irma as of 9/13.
- Hurricane Irma has killed 19 total on the United States mainland (11) and the territories of the U.S. Virgin Islands (4) and Puerto Rico (3).
- 430,000 people are without power in Puerto Rico, and 30,000 without power in the USVI.
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) staff have continued to provide advance support to FEMA and state partners with real-time field measurements and installing storm-tide sensors along the coasts of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

Many National Park Service units have been closed and hundreds of personnel are gearing up for damage assessment, debris removal and helping with search and rescue efforts in the region.

- The U.S. military is providing relief to the affected Islands, having C-17 planes deliver food and other necessities, as well as receiving aid from U.S. Navy ships.
- With at least 70 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service field stations closed, 18 refuges along Florida's west coast, including Key West, J.N. "Ding" Darling and Crystal River, face particularly massive flooding and destructive winds.
- The Bureau of Indian Affairs is assisting the Miccosukee and Seminole tribes, who have lost power.

**Washington Times: Zinke moves to fight wildfires by clearing trees in break with hands-off forestry policy**

*"Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke moved Tuesday to combat the spread of catastrophic wildfires by clearing more trees, a policy switch that represents a dramatic departure from nearly three decades of hands-off management in the federal forests. He released a department-wide memo calling on supervisors and managers to "think about fire in a new and aggressive way" by clearing the dead and dying trees and vegetation that have overrun the federal forests and heightened wildfire danger."*

**TALKING POINTS**

- Secretary Zinke grew up in the heart of America's timberlands in Montana - currently home to some of the strongest and deadliest wildfires this season.
- Secretary Zinke's directive applies to all land management bureaus and services within the department that have burnable vegetation.
- The directive is aimed at restoring proven forest management and preemptive fuels reduction practices in order to help prevent catastrophic wildfires.
- Dead and dying timber from previous fires and disease

infestation plagues our forests and makes them more prone to catastrophic fires. By thinning these fuels, fires do not gain in intensity and grow as quickly. This makes them safer and more manageable to battle.

- The Trump Administration is taking aggressive and preemptive measures to prevent wildfires and combat their spread through active fuels management versus the previous administration's more "naturalist" approach. The naturalist approach allowed fuels to build up and forests to thicken, making them more prone to wildfires that are more difficult and dangerous to suppress.
- The directive also orders bureaus and services to protect structures and assets like visitors centers, lodges, and infrastructure by thinning the urban-wildland interface.
- This order does not allow commercial timber harvests in National Parks. It does however order preemptive fuels management, like what already happens in parks like Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park.

**Washington Post: Interior's 'unusual' transfer of senior executives spurs official probe**

*“The Interior Department’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) is examining the extraordinary and politically suspect reassignment of dozens of Senior Executive Service (SES) members. The OIG’s review is in response to a request from eight Democrats on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. They asked for the probe after one Interior senior executive, Joel Clement, wrote a Washington Post article that said he was reassigned and “retaliated against for speaking out publicly about the dangers that climate change poses to Alaska Native communities.”*

- **Regarding the shuffling of SES at DOI:** The President signed an executive order to reorganize the federal government for the future and the Secretary has been absolutely out front on that issue. In fact, he mentioned a Department-wide, front lines-focused reorganization on his first day address to all employees. The purpose of the Senior Executive Service is to ensure that the executive management of the government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the Nation and otherwise is of the highest quality. Senior executives are the highest paid employees in the federal government and signed up for the SES knowing that they could be called upon to work in different positions at any time. Congress meant for the SES to be a mobile force that are capable of taking on different assignments to meet the needs of the agency. Personnel moves among the Senior Executive Service are being conducted to better serve the taxpayer and the Department's operations.

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*“President Trump paints a picture of burdensome new regulations bearing down on properties designated as national monuments. Again, not true. Any use allowed on the property before a designation — like grazing and logging for example — is retained. Instead, the main impact is to recognize and celebrate priceless natural and cultural resources on lands already owned by the American people.”*

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  - “No President should use the authority under the Antiquities Act to restrict public access, prevent hunting and fishing, burden private land, or eliminate traditional land uses, unless such action is needed to protect the object. The recommendations I sent to the president on national monuments will maintain federal ownership of all federal land and protect the land under federal environmental regulations, and also provide a much-needed change for the local communities who border and rely on these lands for hunting and fishing, economic development, traditional uses, and recreation.”
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- The Antiquities Act calls for the President to designate the “smallest area compatible with proper care and management of the objects to be protected.” Despite this clear directive “smallest area” has become the exception and not the rule.
- In an effort to make the process transparent and give people a voice in the process, the Secretary announced on May 5, 2017 the opening up of a formal comment period for the review. This is the first time ever that a formal comment period was open on [regulations.gov](http://regulations.gov) for National Monuments designated under the Antiquities Act.
- Since May, Secretary Zinke has visited eight national monument sites in six states. He's held dozens of meetings with Tribal, local, and state government officials, local stakeholders, and advocates from conservation, agriculture, tourism, and historic preservation

organizations. The Secretary meets with people and organizations who represent all sides of the issues.

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Deputy Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
C: 202-641-5381

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**From:** Hinson, Alex  
**Sent:** 2017-09-13T14:36:09-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** DOI Daily Report  
**Received:** 2017-09-13T14:36:38-04:00

## INTERIOR DAILY COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

### TV Hits

[Fox Business: Secretary Zinke joins Stuart Varney to discuss Hurricanes and More](#)

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###

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Alex Hinson

Deputy Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
C: 202-641-5381

**To:** Swift, Heather[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov];  
stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov[stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Nathaniel Herz  
**Sent:** 2017-09-13T21:18:47-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-13T21:18:56-04:00

Hey Guys, circling back here -- I'll call tomorrow.

On Tue, Sep 12, 2017 at 4:41 PM, Nathaniel Herz <[nherz@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)> wrote:

Hi Heather (and Steve),

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Thanks,

Nat

[907-793-0312](tel:907-793-0312)

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
[907-793-0312](tel:907-793-0312)  
Twitter: [@nat\\_herz](https://twitter.com/nat_herz)

--

Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
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**To:** Nathaniel Herz[nherz@alaskadispatch.com]  
**Cc:** Wackowski, Stephen[stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Swift, Heather  
**Sent:** 2017-09-14T08:35:45-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-14T08:36:31-04:00

Hey Nat - apologies, I was on the road.

What are you specifically asking about other than Mr. Clement's new job? I want to make sure I get you what you're looking for.

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
[@DOIPressSec](mailto:@DOIPressSec)  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

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[907-793-0312](tel:907-793-0312)  
Twitter: [@nat\\_herz](https://twitter.com/nat_herz)

--

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Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

**To:** Swift, Heather[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**Cc:** Wackowski, Stephen[stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Nathaniel Herz  
**Sent:** 2017-09-14T11:21:25-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-14T11:29:11-04:00

Hi Heather,

Joel has raised some questions about the Trump administration's commitment to maintaining/supporting the federal programs that have been working with coastal Alaska villages -- Newtok, Shishmaref, Shaktoolik and Kivalina -- that are threatened by erosion/rising sea levels. I'm interested in hearing from someone about the administration's plans for those programs and to address Joel's claims that they're kind of in limbo right now.

I'm aware that there's a lot of nuance here, particularly that Obama made a lot of public statements about boosting these programs but never seemed to actually follow through with any money, and so far I'm also hearing from folks in Alaska that they're still largely satisfied with the help they've been getting from the feds in the past few months. But I'm interested in hearing someone from the administration address some of these issues directly.

Let me know if this sounds possible -- I'm also okay reaching out to the White House but also feel like timing is getting tight before the weekend.

Thanks,  
Nat

On Thu, Sep 14, 2017 at 4:35 AM, Swift, Heather <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

Hey Nat - apologies, I was on the road.

What are you specifically asking about other than Mr. Clement's new job? I want to make sure I get you what you're looking for.

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
[@DOIPressSec](mailto:@DOIPressSec)  
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--

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**To:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Michael Doyle  
**Sent:** 2017-09-19T13:39:20-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** OIG/Clement  
**Received:** 2017-09-19T13:41:30-04:00

Good afternoon:

I just got a letter from Joel Clement's lawyer to OIG, asking that his case be included in overall SES inquiry. I am doing a PM story on this, in case you want to weigh in.

Mike

Michael Doyle  
Reporter  
mdoyle@eenews.net  
202-446-0467 x467  
@MichaelDoyle10

**E&E NEWS**

122 C Street NW 7th Floor Washington, DC 20001  
www.eenews.net | [@EENewsUpdates](#)  
Energywire, Climatewire, Greenwire, E&E Daily, E&E News PM

**To:** Michael Doyle[mdoyle@eenews.net]  
**From:** Heather Swift  
**Sent:** 2017-09-19T13:42:30-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: OIG/Clement  
**Received:** 2017-09-19T13:43:19-04:00

I have nothing to add.

Heather Swift  
Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior

On Sep 19, 2017, at 1:40 PM, Michael Doyle <[mdoyle@eenews.net](mailto:mdoyle@eenews.net)> wrote:

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Energywire, Climatewire, Greenwire, E&E Daily, E&E News PM

**To:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Michael Doyle  
**Sent:** 2017-09-19T13:44:34-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** RE: OIG/Clement  
**Received:** 2017-09-19T13:45:40-04:00

OK, thanks.

---

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**E&E NEWS**

122 C Street NW 7th Floor Washington, DC 20001  
[www.eenews.net](http://www.eenews.net) | [@EENewsUpdates](https://twitter.com/EENewsUpdates)  
Energywire, Climatewire, Greenwire, E&E Daily, E&E News PM

**To:** Swift, Heather[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**Cc:** Wackowski, Stephen[stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Nathaniel Herz  
**Sent:** 2017-09-19T18:57:51-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-19T18:58:00-04:00

Hi Heather,

I talked to Steve on a background basis which was useful, but because my newspaper doesn't print anything except for on-record comments from named sources I'm still hoping there could be an opportunity to hear a response from someone from DOI, at a general level, to the arguments we've heard about the Trump administration de-emphasizing the federal government's work to protect and relocate villages being threatened by climate change and rising sea levels. I'm trying to finish up my story tomorrow -- let me know if it would be possible to set something up before the end of the day Wednesday.

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**To:** stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov[stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov];  
katharine\_macgregor@ios.doi.gov[katharine\_macgregor@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Heather Swift  
**Sent:** 2017-09-19T19:22:15-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Fwd: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-19T19:22:22-04:00

Kate-Steve what should I say about relocating Alaska native villages?

Heather Swift  
Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Nathaniel Herz <[nherz@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)>  
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**Sent:** 2017-09-19T20:36:39-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-19T20:36:46-04:00

(b)(5)

Sent from my iPhone

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**Cc:** stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov[stephen\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Heather Swift  
**Sent:** 2017-09-19T20:48:24-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-19T20:48:31-04:00

(b)(5)

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Press Secretary  
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**Cc:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Stephen Wackowski  
**Sent:** 2017-09-19T23:15:18-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-19T23:15:26-04:00

(b)(5)

Sent from my iPhone

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**Cc:** Heather Swift[[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)]  
**From:** Katharine MacGregor  
**Sent:** 2017-09-20T11:00:39-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-20T11:00:48-04:00

(b)(5)

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**Sent:** 2017-09-20T12:13:54-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-20T12:14:17-04:00

So this is about to be overcome by events...Nat just showed up at the oceans conference and came over to see if he could talk with us after Vincent's speech.

(b)(5)

Speech is about to start. Let me know.

Sent from my iPhone

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[907-793-0312](tel:907-793-0312)

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Twitter: [@nat\\_herz](https://twitter.com/nat_herz)

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**To:** Stephen Wackowski[[stephen\\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov](mailto:stephen_wackowski@ios.doi.gov)]  
**Cc:** Katharine MacGregor[[katharine\\_macgregor@ios.doi.gov](mailto:katharine_macgregor@ios.doi.gov)]  
**From:** Swift, Heather  
**Sent:** 2017-09-20T12:15:48-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-20T12:16:37-04:00

Can you give him a basic statement that the Dept. is committed to Alaska and the arctic as is evidenced by the Secretary's first visit to Alaska being on the North Slope.

(b)(5)

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
[@DOIPressSec](mailto:@DOIPressSec)  
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Heather Swift  
Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior

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<[nherz@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)>  
**Date:** September 19, 2017 at 6:57:51 PM EDT  
**To:** "Swift, Heather" <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>  
**Cc:** "Wackowski, Stephen" <[stephen\\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov](mailto:stephen_wackowski@ios.doi.gov)>  
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Hey Nat - apologies, I was on the road.

What are you specifically asking about other than Mr. Clement's new job? I want to make sure I get you what you're looking for.

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**From:** Stephen Wackowski  
**Sent:** 2017-09-20T12:17:33-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-20T12:17:41-04:00

Wilco.

Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Nathaniel Herz  
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**From:** Swift, Heather  
**Sent:** 2017-09-20T12:21:07-04:00  
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can you call me quick 202-208-5338

-

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**To:** "Swift, Heather" <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>  
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Newtok,  
Kivalina,  
Shishmaref  
and  
Shaktoolik.  
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from Joel  
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his  
reassignment  
and have  
talked to him  
directly, and  
his perspective  
is that the  
work the  
department  
was doing to  
help  
coordinate  
these villages  
moving out of  
harm's way has  
largely  
stopped.  
Hoping to hear  
the  
department's  
perspective on  
these issues  
and to  
understand  
what it is or is  
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to work with  
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**To:** Swift, Heather[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Stephen Wackowski  
**Sent:** 2017-09-20T12:45:03-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-20T12:45:11-04:00

Recording his speech and q&a on my phone. He just wrapped up. Calling shortly.

Sent from my iPhone

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**Fro**  
**m:**  
Nath  
aniel  
Herz  
<[nhe  
rz@a  
laska  
dispa  
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om](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)>

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**Cc:** "Wackowski, Stephen"

<[step  
hen\\_  
wack](mailto:stephen_wack)>

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i@io  
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**Subject: Re: Interior resilience efforts**

Hi  
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wrot  
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Hey  
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On Tue, Sep 12, 2017 at 4:41 PM, Nathaniel Herz

<[nherz@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)>  
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Thanks,  
Nat  
907-793-0312

--

Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

**To:** Swift, Heather[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Stephen Wackowski  
**Sent:** 2017-09-20T12:47:44-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-20T12:47:53-04:00

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 20, 2017, at 8:21 AM, Swift, Heather <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

can you call me quick 202-208-5338

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
[@DOIPressSec](mailto:@DOIPressSec)  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

On Wed, Sep 20, 2017 at 12:17 PM, Stephen Wackowski  
<[stephen\\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov](mailto:stephen_wackowski@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

Wilco.

Sent from my iPhone

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Can you give him a basic statement that the Dept. is committed to Alaska and the arctic as is evidenced by the Secretary's first visit to Alaska being on the North Slope.

(b)(5)

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
[@DOIPressSec](mailto:@DOIPressSec)  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

On Wed, Sep 20, 2017 at 12:13 PM, Stephen Wackowski  
<[stephen\\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov](mailto:stephen_wackowski@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

So this is about to be overcome by events...Nat just showed up at the oceans conference and came over to see if he could talk with us after Vincent's speech.

(b)(5)

Speech is about to start. Let me know.

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 20, 2017, at 7:00 AM, Katharine MacGregor  
<[katharine\\_macgregor@ios.doi.gov](mailto:katharine_macgregor@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

(b)(5)

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 19, 2017, at 11:15 PM, Stephen Wackowski  
<[stephen\\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov](mailto:stephen_wackowski@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

(b)(5)

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 19, 2017, at 4:36 PM, Katharine MacGregor  
<[katharine\\_macgregor@ios.doi.gov](mailto:katharine_macgregor@ios.doi.gov)>  
wrote:

(b)(5)

(b)(5)

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 19, 2017, at 7:22 PM, Heather Swift

[<heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov>](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)

wrote:

Kate-Steve what  
should I say  
about relocating  
Alaska native  
villages?

Heather Swift  
Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior

Begin forwarded message:

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**Date:** September 19, 2017 at 6:57:51 PM EDT

**To:** "Swift, Heather" <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>

**Cc:** "Wackowski, Stephen"

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**Subject: Re: Interior resilience efforts**

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On Thu, Sep 14, 2017 at 4:35 AM, Swift, Heather

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On Wed, Sep 13, 2017 at 9:18 PM, Nathaniel Herz

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On Tue, Sep 12, 2017 at 4:41 PM, Nathaniel Herz

<[nathaniel.herz@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:nathaniel.herz@alaskadispatch.com)>  
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Thanks,  
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907-793-0312

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

**To:** Swift, Heather[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Stephen Wackowski  
**Sent:** 2017-09-20T12:51:21-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-20T12:51:29-04:00

Just tried you. Call me back (b)(6)

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 20, 2017, at 8:21 AM, Swift, Heather <heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

can you call me quick 202-208-5338

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
@DOIPressSec  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

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(b)(5)

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
@DOIPressSec  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

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Kate-Steve what  
should I say  
about relocating  
Alaska native  
villages?

Heather Swift  
Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior

Begin forwarded message:

**Fro  
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om](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)>

**Date:** September 19, 2017 at 6:57:51 PM EDT  
**To:** "Swift, Heather" <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>  
**Cc:** "Wackowski, Stephen"

<[step  
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wack](mailto:stephen_wack)>

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**Subject: Re: Interior resilience efforts**

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Thanks,  
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On Thu, Sep 14, 2017 at 4:35 AM, Swift, Heather

<[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>  
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Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
[@DOIPressSec](mailto:@DOIPressSec)  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov)

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On Wed, Sep 13, 2017 at 9:18 PM, Nathaniel Herz

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On Tue, Sep 12, 2017 at 4:41 PM, Nathaniel Herz

<[nherz@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)>  
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Thanks,  
Nat  
907-793-0312

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

**To:** Swift, Heather[[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)]  
**From:** Katharine MacGregor  
**Sent:** 2017-09-20T15:30:35-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Interior resilience efforts  
**Received:** 2017-09-20T15:30:42-04:00

Is he at a conference and speaking to press?

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 20, 2017, at 12:16 PM, Swift, Heather <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

Can you give him a basic statement that the Dept. is committed to Alaska and the arctic as is evidenced by the Secretary's first visit to Alaska being on the North Slope.

(b)(5)

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
@DOIPressSec  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

On Wed, Sep 20, 2017 at 12:13 PM, Stephen Wackowski  
<[stephen\\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov](mailto:stephen_wackowski@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

So this is about to be overcome by events...Nat just showed up at the oceans conference and came over to see if he could talk with us after Vincent's speech.

(b)(5)

Speech is about to start. Let me know.

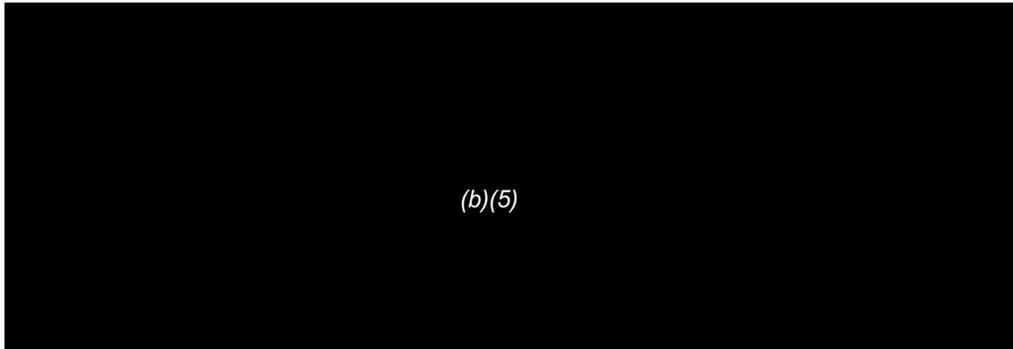
Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 20, 2017, at 7:00 AM, Katharine MacGregor  
<[katharine\\_macgregor@ios.doi.gov](mailto:katharine_macgregor@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

(b)(5)

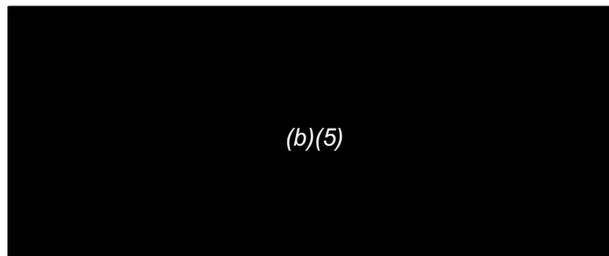
Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 19, 2017, at 11:15 PM, Stephen Wackowski  
<[stephen\\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov](mailto:stephen_wackowski@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:



Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 19, 2017, at 4:36 PM, Katharine MacGregor  
<[katharine\\_macgregor@ios.doi.gov](mailto:katharine_macgregor@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:



Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 19, 2017, at 7:22 PM, Heather Swift  
<[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

Kate-Steve what should I say  
about relocating Alaska native  
villages?

Heather Swift  
Press Secretary  
Department of the Interior

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Nathaniel

Herz

<[nherz@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)>

**Date:** September 19, 2017 at 6:57:51 PM EDT

**To:** "Swift, Heather" <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>

**Cc:** "Wackowski, Stephen"

<[stephen\\_wackowski@ios.doi.gov](mailto:stephen_wackowski@ios.doi.gov)>

**Subject: Re: Interior resilience efforts**

Hi Heather,  
I talked to Steve on a background basis which was useful, but because my newspaper doesn't print anything except for on-record comments from named sources I'm still hoping there could be an opportunity to hear a response from someone from DOI, at a general level, to the arguments we've heard about the Trump administration de-emphasizing the federal government's work to protect and relocate villages being threatened by climate change and rising sea levels. I'm trying to finish up my story tomorrow -- let me know if it

would be possible  
to set something  
up before the end  
of the day  
Wednesday.

Thanks,  
Nat

On Thu, Sep 14, 2017 at 4:35 AM, Swift, Heather  
<[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)> wrote:

Hey Nat -  
apologies, I was  
on the road.

What are you specifically asking about other than Mr.  
Clement's new  
job? I want to  
make sure I get  
you what you're  
looking for.

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
[@DOIPressSec](mailto:@DOIPressSec)  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

On Wed, Sep 13, 2017 at 9:18 PM, Nathaniel Herz  
<[nherz@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)>  
wrote:

Hey Guys,  
circling back  
here -- I'll call  
tomorrow.

On Tue, Sep 12, 2017 at 4:41 PM, Nathaniel Herz  
<[nherz@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:nherz@alaskadispatch.com)>  
wrote:

Hi Heather (and

Steve),  
Wondering if it  
would be  
possible to talk  
with someone  
from DOI about  
some of the  
things we've  
seen reported  
and heard about  
when it comes  
to the  
department's  
efforts to help  
Alaska villages  
threatened by  
rising sea levels --  
Newtok,  
Kivalina,  
Shishmaref and  
Shaktoolik. I've  
obviously read  
the stuff from  
Joel Clement  
about his  
reassignment  
and have talked  
to him directly,  
and his  
perspective is  
that the work  
the department  
was doing to  
help coordinate  
these villages  
moving out of  
harm's way has  
largely stopped.  
Hoping to hear  
the  
department's  
perspective on  
these issues and  
to understand  
what it is or is  
not still doing

to work with  
these villages.  
Could we set  
something up?  
Would like to  
get some on-  
record  
comments but  
also happy to  
hear from you  
guys on  
background as  
well. I'm  
hoping to finish  
a story by the  
end of the  
week.

Thanks,  
Nat  
907-793-0312

--

Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

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Nathaniel Herz  
Alaska Dispatch News  
907-793-0312  
Twitter: @nat\_herz

**To:** Interior\_press@ios.doi.gov[Interior\_press@ios.doi.gov]  
**Cc:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Halper, Evan  
**Sent:** 2017-09-21T09:11:47-04:00  
**Importance:** High  
**Subject:** LA Times questions -- civil service  
**Received:** 2017-09-21T09:11:51-04:00

Good morning:

I am reaching out for comment from for a story about the civil service under the Trump administration. My specific questions:

1. What is your response to the allegations made in the Joel Clement whistle blower complaint?
2. What was the strategy behind reassigning 50 SES employees?
3. What is your response to concerns raised by lawmakers that the reassignments were intended to push senior managers to quit or sideline those who had worked on projects out of step with the president and secretary's politics?
4. Have you publicly disclosed which managers were reassigned and why? Will you?
5. Are more waves of reassignments coming?

You can reach me at 916.201.6398, if you would prefer to discuss in an interview instead of email. My deadline is 3:30 p.m. Appreciate your attention to this.

Best,

Evan Halper  
National Reporter  
Los Angeles Times  
916.201.6398 (cell)

**To:** Hinson, Alex[alex\_hinson@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Swift, Heather  
**Sent:** 2017-09-21T09:16:43-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Fwd: LA Times questions -- civil service  
**Received:** 2017-09-21T09:17:30-04:00

send statement.

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
@DOIPressSec  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** Halper, Evan <[Evan.Halper@latimes.com](mailto:Evan.Halper@latimes.com)>  
**Date:** Thu, Sep 21, 2017 at 9:11 AM  
**Subject:** LA Times questions -- civil service  
**To:** "[Interior\\_press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_press@ios.doi.gov)" <[Interior\\_press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_press@ios.doi.gov)>  
**Cc:** Heather Swift <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>

Good morning:

I am reaching out for comment from for a story about the civil service under the Trump administration. My specific questions:

1. What is your response to the allegations made in the Joel Clement whistle blower complaint?
2. What was the strategy behind reassigning 50 SES employees?
3. What is your response to concerns raised by lawmakers that the reassignments were intended to push senior managers to quit or sideline those who had worked on projects out of step with the president and secretary's politics?
4. Have you publicly disclosed which managers were reassigned and why? Will you?
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You can reach me at 916.201.6398, if you would prefer to discuss in an interview instead of email. My deadline is 3:30 p.m. Appreciate your attention to this.

Best,

Evan Halper  
National Reporter  
Los Angeles Times

916.201.6398 (cell)

**To:** CabinetAffairs@who.eop.gov[CabinetAffairs@who.eop.gov]  
**From:** Mashburn, Lori  
**Sent:** 2017-10-13T12:26:44-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** DOI Cabinet Affairs Report for 10/13  
**Received:** 2017-10-13T12:27:33-04:00  
DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS 10-13-17.docx

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS –  
10/13/17**

Lori Mashburn, White House Liaison  
Natalie Davis, Special Assistant to the Secretary

**STATUS OF THE SECRETARY**

10/12-14 Grand Canyon, AZ – National Park Foundation Board of Director's Meeting

- Speech to National Park Service addressing sexual harassment
- (Tent) Sportsmen Board formation announcements

**NEXT WEEK:**

10/16 DC – Remarks for The Heritage Foundation President's Club event at EEOB

Attend Cabinet Meeting at White House

10/17 DC – Meeting with former DOI Secretary Gayle Norton

10/18 DC – Meeting with Danish Ambassador

10/19 DC – Internal meetings

10/20 CA – Personal Day

**STATUS OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY**

TODAY: The Deputy Secretary is in Washington, DC.

Small Group meeting at WH on Hurricane Recovery Framework

**WH COMMS REPORT** (submitted Thursday, 10/12)

**Press Inquiries:**

- Many small inquiries and logistical inquiries

**Top Stories**

- **CNN:** Zinke's travel continues to raise ethical questions
- **Washington Post:** The Energy 202: Coal production is actually up under Trump. Should he get credit?

- **Salt Lake Tribune:** House committee OKs bill to curb president's monument-creation power under 111-year-old Antiquities Act
- **Washington Post:** Interior Secretary Zinke's claim that the U.S. has struggled to produce 'low-cost, abundant and reliable energy'

### **Top Issues and Accomplishments**

- Interior continues to support all Hurricane Harvey, Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Maria, and Hurricane Nate efforts. All bureaus are executing their emergency plans and assisting in Hurricane relief.
- Tomorrow, Secretary Zinke will make a major announcement at Grand Canyon National Park about the results of a NPS workplace harassment survey. This event will be open press.

### **OF NOTE**

#### **Secretary Zinke & National Park Service to Announce Action Plan to Combat & Eliminate Harassment and Intimidation**

**GRAND CANYON, AZ** - On Friday, October 13, 2017, at a Grand Canyon National Park (GCNP) all-employee meeting, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke will discuss how he will combat and eliminate harassment, discrimination, and intimidation. The Secretary will be joined by Acting National Park Service Director Mike Reynolds, who will announce the results of the National Park Service-wide survey on harassment, discrimination, and intimidation.

The Secretary's opening remarks will be open to media. However, the employee Q&A will be closed in order to ensure the employees feel comfortable asking candid questions. Following the Q&A with park employees, the Secretary and Acting Director will participate in a media call with reporters who have RSVPed per instructions below.

### **AGENCY MEDIA**

**WEEK AHEAD October 11 thru October 19, 2017 (Submitted 10/11)**

#### **U.S. Department of the Interior**

*Secretarial-level Announcements/Events/Interviews*

- **October 13:** Secretary Zinke is speaking to National Park Service employees nationwide from the Grand Canyon to discuss issues and results of the NPS workplace survey (mainly highlighting harassment). He will also conduct a press call about the survey. Comms plan will be shared shortly.
- **October 14:** Secretary Zinke will attend the National Park Foundation Board of Director's Meeting at the Grand Canyon.

- **October 13 (tent.): Department-level Release:** DOI and BOEM press release on Proposed Notice of Sale for Gulf of Mexico Lease Sale 250.

### Interior Social Media Updates

- **October 18: Department-level blog post:** DOI to publish a blog post honoring Alaska Day, the 150th anniversary of the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States, and highlighting Interior's connection to the state.

### National Park Service

- **October 13: National NPS Release:** DOI and NPS will announce the results of the National Park Service Workplace harassment Survey.

### U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- **October 17-18:** FWS will meet in Bloomington, Minnesota, to discuss regulatory frameworks for the 2018-19 migratory game bird hunting season lengths, dates and bag limits. Each year, FWS works in partnership with states from the four Flyway Councils (Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic) to establish regulatory frameworks for hunting season lengths, dates and bag limits.

### Bureau of Land Management

- **October TBD: National BLM Release:** BLM will issue a release announcing that the Sabinoso Wilderness area is now open to the public
  - **October 16: Local BLM Release:** The 45-day public comment period concludes for the BLM-NV Draft Environmental Impact Statement for a proposed expansion of the Phoenix Mine. The gold and copper mine currently employs about 500 people and is located approximately 12 miles southwest of Battle Mountain in Lander County, NV.
  - **October 16–17:** Acting BLM Director Michael Nedd will be visiting Carlsbad, NM, to attend the Carlsbad Mayor's Energy Summit. He will also be touring the BLM-NM Carlsbad Field Office area with Acting BLM-NM State Director Aden Seidlitz.
  - **October 17: Local BLM Release:** BLM-MT will hold a sealed-bid competitive coal lease sale for a 320-acre tract in McLean County, ND, containing an estimated 2.2 million tons of in-place Federal coal resources. The BLM is offering the tract in response to an application filed by the Falkirk Mining Company in November 2013. Located approximately two miles northeast of Underwood, the tract is within and adjacent to the Falkirk Mine, which employs more than 500 workers and produces more than 8 million tons of lignite coal per year. The BLM analyzed the impacts of leasing the coal in an EA and signed a Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record earlier this year.
  - **October 17-19:** BLM Acting Deputy Director John Ruhs and Wild Horse and Burro Program Division Chief Dean Bolstad will attend the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Meeting in Grand Junction, CO, to discuss program updates.

- **October 19:** BLM-AK will host a Public Land Order strategy meeting with the State of Alaska to discuss land selection conflicts (i.e., prior Native selections). BLM-AK anticipates receiving an updated priority conveyance listing from the State prior to this meeting. The group was established to assist the State in prioritizing their remaining land entitlement and selections.

### U.S. Geological Survey

• **October 17 (tent.): National USGS Release:** USGS will issue a release on a study that was done in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control. Its findings can be used to assess the potential for exposure to arsenic through domestic well water and may be useful in evaluating some cancer and other adverse health outcomes on a national scale.

- **October 17 (tent.): National Joint Release:** USGS, along with other agencies/groups (Natural Resources Canada, the University of Calgary, and the Sitka Sound Science Center in Alaska) will issue a release discussing work to better understand the Queen Charlotte fault, and in the process, their discovery of extraordinary seafloor features.

### Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management

- **October 13 (tent.): National BOEM Release:** BOEM Minerals Management Program will issue a release on an agreement with Brevard Co., FL, and USACE Jacksonville on Hurricane Matthew (2016) Hurricane and Storm Damage Reduction Project. The new Environmental Assessment and FONSI are completed and have been posted to the Florida MMP page. The agreement is pending signature by the Corps and Brevard County.

### CONGRESSIONAL

N/A

### POLITICAL APPOINTEE UPDATE

DOI politicals on board = 59

3 PAS confirmed as of 9/18.

4 nominated awaiting confirmation:

- Pending Senate floor vote: Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary Policy Management and Budget.
- Pending Senate floor vote: Brenda Berman, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation.
- Pending Senate floor vote: Joe Balash, Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals
- Pending Senate floor vote: Ryan Douglas Nelson, Solicitor

Overall:

- Schedule C: 33 of 68 onboard; 4 starting; 6 in process

- NC-SES: 23 of 44 onboard; 2 starting; 4 in process
- PAS: 3 Confirmed; 4 Announced; 15 of 17 Submitted to PPO

**SECRETARY SPEAKING INVITATIONS**

Accepted:

10/13 – National Park Foundation BOD Meeting (Grand Canyon, AZ)

10/16 – Heritage Annual President's Club Meeting (DC)

Oct (TBC date) - Weyrich Lunch (DC)

Open (date TBC)- Americans for Tax Reform (DC)

Open (date TBC)- Detroit Economic Club

Event Postponed by organizers due to fire - 10/21 – DEPA BOD Meeting (CA)

Outstanding Invitations in Process:

10/28 Remarks at Washington International Horse Show DC)

10/29 Friends of Theodore Roosevelt Island (DC)

11/7-9 National Ranger Council Annual Meeting (Gettysburg, PA)

11/9 – National WWI Memorial at Pershing Park (DC)

11/13 Montana Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting (Billings, MT)

11/29 Association of California Water Agencies 2017 Fall Conference and Exhibition  
(Anaheim, CA)

12/5-7 America Outdoors Association's 29th Annual Marketing and Management  
Conference for Outfitters and Adventure Resorts (Reno, NV)

12/6 American Exploration and Mining Association Annual Meeting (Reno, NV)

12/8 - Valley Industry and Commerce Association Annual Meeting (Los Angeles, CA)

Declining

10/13 - Public Land & Resources Law Review's Public Land Law Conference  
(Missoula, MT)

10/15 - National Congress of American Indians 74 Annual Convention (Milwaukee, WI)

10/16 - Carlsbad Mayor's Energy Summit (Carlsbad, NM)

10-16-17 Americans For Tax Reform Coalition Leaders Summit (Miami Beach, FL)

- 10/17 – Folsom Dam Joint Federal Project Completion Ceremony (Folsam, CA)
- 10/17 – National Association of Sporting Goods Wholesalers (San Antonio, TX)
- 10/18 - Environmental Law Institute (ELI) 2017 Award Dinner (DC)
- 10/19 – USO Gala (Washington, DC)
- 10/19 – Grand Junction Petroleum and Mining Club (Grand Junction, CO)
- 10/20 - TXOGA Lone Star Energy Forum (Woodlands, TX)
- 10/26 - Montana Chamber Annual Meeting (Great Falls, MT)
- 10/28 – Cattle Producers of Washington Annual Meeting (Airway Heights, WA)
- 10/30-11/3 – International Mining and Resources Conference (Melbourne, Australia)
- 10/31 - George B. Hartzog, Jr. Awards and Speaker Program Clemson University (SC)
- 11/1 - 2017 SHIFT (Shaping How we Invest For Tomorrow) Festival (Jackson Hole, WY)
- 11/4 Governor Reynolds Annual Pheasant Hunt
- 11/8 – WY Governor Annual Business Forum (Cheyenne, WY)
- 11/9 - America First Energy Conference hosted by Heartland Institute (Houston, TX)
- 11/9 - Bass Fishing Hall of Fame Induction Dinner at the Wonders of Wildlife (Springfield, MO)
- 11/14 – George Rogers Clark National Historical Park Quarter Launch (Vincennes, Indiana)

## **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT** (new)

### **Hurricane Response/Recovery:**

The National Weather Service (NWS) reports that a Flash Flood Warning remains in effect for portions of the municipalities of Isabela and Quebradillas due to the Guajataca Dam.

The Department of Homeland Security reports that, in Puerto Rico, approximately 17-percent of the population has power, but instability is causing fluctuations during the restoration process. The power authority estimates that 75-percent of Puerto Rico's power will be restored by late December. Voice and text messaging is available for 64-percent of Puerto Rico's population, and potable water is available to 64-percent of the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (PRASA) clients. The La Plata Dam has been re-energized, providing the capability to supply potable water to 140,000 customers in the San Juan metropolitan area.

A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) lab assessment team arrived yesterday to

assess public health labs. Road clearance operations are focused on clearing routes critical to logistics flow to isolated mountain areas, with U.S. Marines in the final stages of clearing routes from Ponce to inland municipalities. The Guajataca spillway channel has been reinforced with concrete barriers along compromised portions, and 220 super sandbags have also been placed.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, grid power availability remains at 14.4-percent for St. Thomas, 12-percent for St. Croix, and zero-percent for St. John. Department of Defense medical personnel are supporting the medical center on St. Thomas and expect to establish an interim medical facility on St. Croix by today. Power loss at the Department of Health medical clinic rendered the vaccine supply unusable. Pharmaceuticals, including vaccines, were delivered to two large pharmacies. No major roadways are closed, and 95-percent of all roadways are passable.

There are a total of 135 DOI Personnel supporting Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Interagency response and recovery missions. An additional 80 personnel are deployed in support of DOI led response and recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. There are 239 DOI personnel that remain at their home station in Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands.

**In support of inter-agency response/recover operations:**

DOI Maria QRT 3 team is expected to demobilize on October 16, and no additional QRT teams are expected to deploy to the area.

In response to Hurricane Harvey, USGS reports that 6 personnel were in Texas flagging and surveying high water marks in association with a FEMA Mission Assignment. Further, OEPC reports that FEMA has informed OEPC of desire to pursue a Mission Assignment for 20 DOI personnel to support Environmental and Historic Preservation, ensuring compliance with regulations and providing assistance to natural and cultural private-non-profits.

**Response efforts not associated with inter-agency response/recovery:**

The Director of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Lisa Branum, accompanied by representation from the OEM Preparedness and Response Division and the Office of Insular Affairs, arrived in the U.S. Virgin Islands last week in coordination with local DOI response personnel. The team has been engaged with NPS, USFWS, USGS, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE), and other response elements, as well as the Joint Field Office and the Federal Coordinating Officer. The team is scheduled to return to CONUS on October 16.

FWS reports that efforts are under way to demobilize FWS response personnel as the situation in Puerto Rico transitions from response to long-term recovery.

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**To:** Caroline Boulton[caroline\_boulton@ios.doi.gov]; Daniel Jorjani[daniel.jorjani@sol.doi.gov]; David Bernhardt [REDACTED] (b)(6)@ios.doi.gov; Douglas Domenech[douglas\_domenech@ios.doi.gov]; Getto, Leila[leila\_getto@ios.doi.gov]; James Cason[james\_cason@ios.doi.gov]; Laura Rigas[laura\_rigas@ios.doi.gov]; Magallanes, Downey[downey\_magallanes@ios.doi.gov]; Mashburn, Lori[lori\_mashburn@ios.doi.gov]; Micah Chambers[micah\_chambers@ios.doi.gov]; Russell Newell[russell\_newell@ios.doi.gov]; Scott Hommel[scott\_hommel@ios.doi.gov]; Swift, Heather[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]; Thiele, Aaron[aaron\_thiele@ios.doi.gov]; Willens, Todd[todd\_willens@ios.doi.gov]; Natalie Davis[natalie\_davis@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Mashburn, Lori  
**Sent:** 2017-10-13T12:27:17-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Fwd: DOI Cabinet Affairs Report for 10/13  
**Received:** 2017-10-13T12:28:10-04:00  
[DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS 10-13-17.docx](#)

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR DAILY UPDATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS –  
10/13/17**

Lori Mashburn, White House Liaison  
Natalie Davis, Special Assistant to the Secretary

**STATUS OF THE SECRETARY**

10/12-14 Grand Canyon, AZ – National Park Foundation Board of Director's Meeting

- Speech to National Park Service addressing sexual harassment
- (Tent) Sportsmen Board formation announcements

**NEXT WEEK:**

10/16 DC – Remarks for The Heritage Foundation President's Club event at EEOB  
Attend Cabinet Meeting at White House

10/17 DC – Meeting with former DOI Secretary Gayle Norton

10/18 DC – Meeting with Danish Ambassador

10/19 DC – Internal meetings

10/20 CA – Personal Day

**STATUS OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY**

TODAY: The Deputy Secretary is in Washington, DC.  
Small Group meeting at WH on Hurricane Recovery Framework

**WH COMMS REPORT** (submitted Thursday, 10/12)

**Press Inquiries:**

· Many small inquiries and logistical inquiries

## **Top Stories**

- **CNN:** [Zinke's travel continues to raise ethical questions](#)
- **Washington Post:** [The Energy 202: Coal production is actually up under Trump. Should he get credit?](#)
- **Salt Lake Tribune:** [House committee OKs bill to curb president's monument-creation power under 111-year-old Antiquities Act](#)
- **Washington Post:** [Interior Secretary Zinke's claim that the U.S. has struggled to produce 'low-cost, abundant and reliable energy'](#)

## **Top Issues and Accomplishments**

- Interior continues to support all Hurricane Harvey, Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Maria, and Hurricane Nate efforts. All bureaus are executing their emergency plans and assisting in Hurricane relief.
- Tomorrow, Secretary Zinke will make a major announcement at Grand Canyon National Park about the results of a NPS workplace harassment survey. This event will be open press.

## **OF NOTE**

### **Secretary Zinke & National Park Service to Announce Action Plan to Combat & Eliminate Harassment and Intimidation**

**GRAND CANYON, AZ** - On Friday, October 13, 2017, at a Grand Canyon National Park (GCNP) all-employee meeting, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke will discuss how he will combat and eliminate harassment, discrimination, and intimidation. The Secretary will be joined by Acting National Park Service Director Mike Reynolds, who will announce the results of the National Park Service-wide survey on harassment, discrimination, and intimidation.

The Secretary's opening remarks will be open to media. However, the employee Q&A will be closed in order to ensure the employees feel comfortable asking candid questions. Following the Q&A with park employees, the Secretary and Acting Director will participate in a media call with reporters who have RSVPed per instructions below.

## **AGENCY MEDIA**

**WEEK AHEAD October 11 thru October 19, 2017 (Submitted 10/11)**

### **U.S. Department of the Interior**

*Secretarial-level Announcements/Events/Interviews*

- **October 13:** Secretary Zinke is speaking to National Park Service employees nationwide from the Grand Canyon to discuss issues and results of the NPS

workplace survey (mainly highlighting harassment). He will also conduct a press call about the survey. Comms plan will be shared shortly.

- **October 14:** Secretary Zinke will attend the National Park Foundation Board of Director's Meeting at the Grand Canyon.

- **October 13 (tent.): Department-level Release:** DOI and BOEM press release on Proposed Notice of Sale for Gulf of Mexico Lease Sale 250.

### **Interior Social Media Updates**

- **October 18: Department-level blog post:** DOI to publish a blog post honoring Alaska Day, the 150th anniversary of the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States, and highlighting Interior's connection to the state.

### **National Park Service**

- **October 13: National NPS Release:** DOI and NPS will announce the results of the National Park Service Workplace harassment Survey.

### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

- **October 17-18:** FWS will meet in Bloomington, Minnesota, to discuss regulatory frameworks for the 2018-19 migratory game bird hunting season lengths, dates and bag limits. Each year, FWS works in partnership with states from the four Flyway Councils (Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic) to establish regulatory frameworks for hunting season lengths, dates and bag limits.

### **Bureau of Land Management**

- **October TBD: National BLM Release:** BLM will issue a release announcing that the Sabinoso Wilderness area is now open to the public

- **October 16: Local BLM Release:** The 45-day public comment period concludes for the BLM-NV Draft Environmental Impact Statement for a proposed expansion of the Phoenix Mine. The gold and copper mine currently employs about 500 people and is located approximately 12 miles southwest of Battle Mountain in Lander County, NV.

- **October 16-17:** Acting BLM Director Michael Nedd will be visiting Carlsbad, NM, to attend the Carlsbad Mayor's Energy Summit. He will also be touring the BLM-NM Carlsbad Field Office area with Acting BLM-NM State Director Aden Seidlitz.

- **October 17: Local BLM Release:** BLM-MT will hold a sealed-bid competitive coal lease sale for a 320-acre tract in McLean County, ND, containing an estimated 2.2 million tons of in-place Federal coal resources. The BLM is offering the tract in response to an application filed by the Falkirk Mining Company in November 2013. Located approximately two miles northeast of Underwood, the tract is within and adjacent to the Falkirk Mine, which employs more than 500 workers and produces more than 8 million tons of lignite coal per

year. The BLM analyzed the impacts of leasing the coal in an EA and signed a Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record earlier this year.

- **October 17-19:** BLM Acting Deputy Director John Ruhs and Wild Horse and Burro Program Division Chief Dean Bolstad will attend the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Meeting in Grand Junction, CO, to discuss program updates.
- **October 19:** BLM-AK will host a Public Land Order strategy meeting with the State of Alaska to discuss land selection conflicts (i.e., prior Native selections). BLM-AK anticipates receiving an updated priority conveyance listing from the State prior to this meeting. The group was established to assist the State in prioritizing their remaining land entitlement and selections.

### **U.S. Geological Survey**

- **October 17 (tent.): National USGS Release:** USGS will issue a release on a study that was done in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control. Its findings can be used to assess the potential for exposure to arsenic through domestic well water and may be useful in evaluating some cancer and other adverse health outcomes on a national scale.

- **October 17 (tent.): National Joint Release:** USGS, along with other agencies/groups (Natural Resources Canada, the University of Calgary, and the Sitka Sound Science Center in Alaska) will issue a release discussing work to better understand the Queen Charlotte fault, and in the process, their discovery of extraordinary seafloor features.

### **Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management**

- **October 13 (tent.): National BOEM Release:** BOEM Minerals Management Program will issue a release on an agreement with Brevard Co., FL, and USACE Jacksonville on Hurricane Matthew (2016) Hurricane and Storm Damage Reduction Project. The new Environmental Assessment and FONSI are completed and have been posted to the Florida MMP page. The agreement is pending signature by the Corps and Brevard County.

### **CONGRESSIONAL**

N/A

### **POLITICAL APPOINTEE UPDATE**

DOI politicals on board = 59

3 PAS confirmed as of 9/18.

4 nominated awaiting confirmation:

- Pending Senate floor vote: Susan Combs, Assistant Secretary Policy Management and Budget.
- Pending Senate floor vote: Brenda Berman, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation.

- Pending Senate floor vote: Joe Balash, Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals
  - Pending Senate floor vote: Ryan Douglas Nelson, Solicitor
- Overall:
- Schedule C: 33 of 68 onboard; 4 starting; 6 in process
  - NC-SES: 23 of 44 onboard; 2 starting; 4 in process
  - PAS: 3 Confirmed; 4 Announced; 15 of 17 Submitted to PPO

### **SECRETARY SPEAKING INVITATIONS**

#### Accepted:

10/13 – National Park Foundation BOD Meeting (Grand Canyon, AZ)

10/16 – Heritage Annual President's Club Meeting (DC)

Oct (TBC date) - Weyrich Lunch (DC)

Open (date TBC)- Americans for Tax Reform (DC)

Open (date TBC)- Detroit Economic Club

Event Postponed by organizers due to fire - 10/21 – DEPA BOD Meeting (CA)

#### Outstanding Invitations in Process:

10/28 Remarks at Washington International Horse Show DC)

10/29 Friends of Theodore Roosevelt Island (DC)

11/7-9 National Ranger Council Annual Meeting (Gettysburg, PA)

11/9 – National WWI Memorial at Pershing Park (DC)

11/13 Montana Farm Bureau Federation Annual Meeting (Billings, MT)

11/29 Association of California Water Agencies 2017 Fall Conference and Exhibition (Anaheim, CA)

12/5-7 America Outdoors Association's 29th Annual Marketing and Management Conference for Outfitters and Adventure Resorts (Reno, NV)

12/6 American Exploration and Mining Association Annual Meeting (Reno, NV)

12/8 - Valley Industry and Commerce Association Annual Meeting (Los Angeles, CA)

#### Declining

10/13 - Public Land & Resources Law Review's Public Land Law Conference (Missoula, MT)

10/15 - National Congress of American Indians 74 Annual Convention (Milwaukee, WI)  
10/16 - Carlsbad Mayor's Energy Summit (Carlsbad, NM)  
10-16-17 Americans For Tax Reform Coalition Leaders Summit (Miami Beach, FL)  
10/17 – Folsom Dam Joint Federal Project Completion Ceremony (Folsom, CA)  
10/17 – National Association of Sporting Goods Wholesalers (San Antonio, TX)  
10/18 - Environmental Law Institute (ELI) 2017 Award Dinner (DC)  
10/19 – USO Gala (Washington, DC)  
10/19 – Grand Junction Petroleum and Mining Club (Grand Junction, CO)  
10/20 - TXOGA Lone Star Energy Forum (Woodlands, TX)  
10/26 - Montana Chamber Annual Meeting (Great Falls, MT)  
10/28 – Cattle Producers of Washington Annual Meeting (Airway Heights, WA)  
10/30-11/3 – International Mining and Resources Conference (Melbourne, Australia)  
10/31 - George B. Hartzog, Jr. Awards and Speaker Program Clemson University (SC)  
11/1 - 2017 SHIFT (Shaping How we Invest For Tomorrow) Festival (Jackson Hole, WY)  
11/4 Governor Reynolds Annual Pheasant Hunt  
11/8 – WY Governor Annual Business Forum (Cheyenne, WY)  
11/9 - America First Energy Conference hosted by Heartland Institute (Houston, TX)  
11/9 - Bass Fishing Hall of Fame Induction Dinner at the Wonders of Wildlife (Springfield, MO)  
11/14 – George Rogers Clark National Historical Park Quarter Launch (Vincennes, Indiana)

## **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT** (new)

### **Hurricane Response/Recovery:**

The National Weather Service (NWS) reports that a Flash Flood Warning remains in effect for portions of the municipalities of Isabela and Quebradillas due to the Guajataca Dam.

The Department of Homeland Security reports that, in Puerto Rico, approximately 17-percent of the population has power, but instability is causing fluctuations during the restoration process. The power authority estimates that 75-percent of Puerto Rico's power will be restored by late December. Voice and text messaging is available for 64-

percent of Puerto Rico's population, and potable water is available to 64-percent of the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (PRASA) clients. The La Plata Dam has been re-energized, providing the capability to supply potable water to 140,000 customers in the San Juan metropolitan area.

A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) lab assessment team arrived yesterday to assess public health labs. Road clearance operations are focused on clearing routes critical to logistics flow to isolated mountain areas, with U.S. Marines in the final stages of clearing routes from Ponce to inland municipalities. The Guajataca spillway channel has been reinforced with concrete barriers along compromised portions, and 220 super sandbags have also been placed.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, grid power availability remains at 14.4-percent for St. Thomas, 12-percent for St. Croix, and zero-percent for St. John. Department of Defense medical personnel are supporting the medical center on St. Thomas and expect to establish an interim medical facility on St. Croix by today. Power loss at the Department of Health medical clinic rendered the vaccine supply unusable. Pharmaceuticals, including vaccines, were delivered to two large pharmacies. No major roadways are closed, and 95-percent of all roadways are passable.

There are a total of 135 DOI Personnel supporting Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Interagency response and recovery missions. An additional 80 personnel are deployed in support of DOI led response and recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. There are 239 DOI personnel that remain at their home station in Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands.

**In support of inter-agency response/recover operations:**

DOI Maria QRT 3 team is expected to demobilize on October 16, and no additional QRT teams are expected to deploy to the area.

In response to Hurricane Harvey, USGS reports that 6 personnel were in Texas flagging and surveying high water marks in association with a FEMA Mission Assignment. Further, OEPC reports that FEMA has informed OEPC of desire to pursue a Mission Assignment for 20 DOI personnel to support Environmental and Historic Preservation, ensuring compliance with regulations and providing assistance to natural and cultural private-non-profits.

**Response efforts not associated with inter-agency response/recovery:**

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**To:** [REDACTED] NR-Ryan Zinke; Downey  
Magallanes[downey\_magallanes@ios.doi.gov]; Scott Hommel[scott\_hommel@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Laura Rigas  
**Sent:** 2017-10-13T12:27:34-04:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Fwd: News Summary  
**Received:** 2017-10-13T12:27:52-04:00  
[ATT00001.htm](#)  
[US DepartmentoftheInteriorNewsBriefing 20171013.pdf](#)

Here's a version for this am. We are still trying to figure out why we did not get the regular bulletin news. My apologies.

Laura Keehner Rigas  
Communications Director  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
(202) 897-7022 cell  
@Interior

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Hunter, Jeffrey" <[jeffrey\\_hunter@ios.doi.gov](mailto:jeffrey_hunter@ios.doi.gov)>  
**To:** OS\_OCO <[os\\_oco@ios.doi.gov](mailto:os_oco@ios.doi.gov)>  
**Subject:** News Summary

Here you go.

Jeffrey Hunter  
Administrative Officer  
Office of the Secretary  
Office of Communications  
202-208-3015

**To:** Heather Swift[heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Heather swift  
**Sent:** 2017-11-17T13:57:00-05:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
**Received:** 2017-11-17T13:57:14-05:00

<https://www.thenation.com/article/the-plot-to-sell-americas-wilderness/>

# The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness

A little-known bureaucrat named James Cason is reshaping the Department of the Interior.

By [Adam Federman](#)

Yesterday 6:00 am

Illustration by Nurul Hana Anwar.

## Feeling overwhelmed?

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One day in Mid-March, James Cason, the associate deputy secretary at the Department of the Interior, convened an impromptu meeting of the senior staff of the Bureau of Land Management. Cason, whose office is on the sixth floor, rarely wandered the halls, and some career civil servants still had never met him. A soft-spoken and unassuming man, Cason has cycled in and out of Republican administrations since the early 1980s and has largely avoided public attention. But people who have worked with him know him as a highly effective administrator and a disciple of some of the department's most notorious anti-environment leaders in previous years—a “hatchet man,” in the words of one former DOI employee who worked with him during the George W. Bush administration.

*This article was reported in partnership with the Investigative Fund at the*

*Nation Institute.*

About 30 employees were ushered into a conference room, where Cason announced that Kristin Bail, acting director of the BLM, would be replaced by Mike Nedd. The move itself wasn't all that surprising: Bail, who came from a conservation background, had been appointed in the final days of the Obama administration to serve in a temporary capacity; Nedd, who had been assistant director for energy, minerals, and realty management since 2007, was viewed as better positioned to implement the new administration's pro-industry agenda.

But the way Cason handled the meeting sent a stark message. According to two people who were present, he delivered what appeared to be hastily prepared remarks thanking Bail for her service but telling her that she was no longer needed in the position. One employee, who has since left the DOI, said it was unclear whether Bail had been told beforehand of her demotion. "It was one of the most awkward, disrespectful things I've ever seen," the former employee said. The spectacle amounted to a kind of public dismissal—and a warning shot. The meeting ended as abruptly as it had begun, with employees left staring at their seats. By the end of the day, Bail was carrying her things out of her office in a box and looking for another place to sit.

Bail's transfer was the opening salvo in an unprecedented restructuring of the DOI. Three months later, in what some department staffers now call the "Thursday-night massacre," Cason sent memos to more than two dozen of the DOI's highest-ranking civil servants informing them of reassignments; they had 15 days to accept the new positions or retire. The Office of the Inspector General is currently investigating how the transfers were determined; some employees believe they were designed to push out long-serving staff as part of a department-wide purge, and that climate scientists in particular were targeted.

Cason, who once described himself as the department's "regulatory czar," has also overseen the dismantling of rules governing energy development on public lands. The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining—from Utah's red-rock country to the frigid, perilous waters off Alaska's coast—while stripping away basic

environmental protections and reducing transparency. Across the Trump administration, the new mantra is “energy dominance”—a vision of the world in which the United States will amplify its influence with a dramatic expansion of oil, gas, and coal production, whatever the environmental costs.

**The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining, from Utah’s red-rock country to Alaska’s frigid coastal waters.**

The axing of regulations and personnel is occurring with remarkable speed. In contrast to other federal departments mired by inept leadership in the Trump era, a small group of seasoned insiders has kept things humming along at the Department of the Interior, Cason chief among them. In the early months of the administration, according to one former DOI employee, there seemed to be few decisions, no matter how small, that didn’t cross his desk.

“From what I can tell, Jim Cason is running the show,” the former employee said. “I think he’s overseeing everything.” In addition to orchestrating the personnel reassignments and chairing the regulatory-reform task force that has rewritten or eliminated many Obama-era policies, Cason has been tasked with reviewing every grant or cooperative agreement of \$100,000 or more, as well as any pending decisions with “nationwide, regional, or statewide impact.” He wrote the *Federal Register* notice announcing the department’s controversial review of 27 national monuments, and he has been granted virtual *carte blanche* to set policy as it relates to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Cason’s return to the DOI doesn’t surprise Jim Cubie, who was chief counsel to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) in 1989, when Leahy oversaw [an Agriculture Committee hearing](#) on Cason’s nomination to a top environmental post in the George H.W. Bush administration. Cason’s track record so alarmed the committee that he was eventually forced to withdraw his name from consideration. Now he’s back in a position that doesn’t require Senate approval. “He’ll do a lot of damage,” Cubie predicted.

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knowledge of the Department of the Interior. (The DOI declined to make Cason available for an interview.) He faithfully carried out the agendas of two of the most controversial interior secretaries in recent memory—James Watt and Gale Norton. From 1985 to 1989, during the Reagan administration, Cason was deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management; in that capacity, he worked closely with Steven Griles, a former coal lobbyist and the chief architect of some of the most environmentally destructive policies of the Reagan years. Griles helped to engineer the regulatory changes that facilitated mountaintop-removal mining, and he interfered with a Fish and Wildlife Service report on the potential environmental damage caused by coastal drilling. As head of the DOI's Office of Surface Mining in the early 1980s, Griles also failed to collect tens of millions of dollars in civil penalties owed by companies that had broken environmental laws.

Throughout this period, Cason served as Griles's right-hand man, according to a former congressional staffer familiar with his record. "He learned well at Griles's knee about how to get stuff done," the staffer said. The two became close friends; Griles was best man at Cason's wedding in 1990. And in 2001, when Griles returned to the department under George W. Bush after more than a decade of lobbying for coal companies and other special interests, Cason joined him as his associate deputy. According to a former DOI employee who worked with Cason during the Bush administration, "Griles would have whatever idea, and Jim would figure out how to get it implemented. He's quite effective at doing that. He was known as Griles's hatchet man."

But unlike Griles, who was sentenced to 10 months in prison after lying to Congress about his ties to the disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, Cason has largely avoided the public eye. His personal style is exceedingly restrained, particularly in contrast with more flamboyant and controversial colleagues like Griles, who was known for being a brash talker with a volatile temper. Cason has a monotone way of speaking; he often dresses in a subdued blue suit and tie and seems to go out of his way to be agreeable. In an [appearance on C-SPAN](#) in 2005, as the Abramoff investigations were gaining momentum, a caller described Cason as a "Republican toady" and attacked the DOI for its policies toward Native Americans. Cason replied evenly, "OK, well, that's certainly a good point

of view too.”

Even when not behind the scenes at the DOI, Cason maintained a low profile. He’s never worked as a registered lobbyist. During the Clinton administration, he lived in Western New York and was vice president of risk management at a company that manufactures ceramic-fiber products for industrial applications. More recently, he’s done consulting work for Booz Allen Hamilton and Kelly Anderson & Associates (now KAA Federal Solutions), a business-management firm that works with federal and industrial clients. On his financial-disclosure form, submitted in July, Cason provided so few details about the contracting work he’d done with the Quapaw tribe in Oklahoma that, after queries by ProPublica, the DOI was forced to submit a revised version. In it, [Cason revealed](#) that over a five-month period in 2016, he’d earned \$50,000 doing “research” for the tribe. (The department’s ethics lawyer called the omission an “oversight.”)

KAA chief executive officer Tim Vigotsky, who hired Cason in 2012, describes him as a policy wonk who knows the DOI better than anyone. “There’s not a lot of flash,” Vigotsky said. “He works long hours—whatever it takes.” Because Cason wasn’t registered as a lobbyist at Booz Allen or Kelly Anderson, it’s unclear who his clients in the energy sector might have been. Vigotsky called Kelly Anderson’s list a “who’s who” of the industry but wouldn’t reveal the names of private clients. Much of the firm’s work involves providing assistance to companies seeking federal contracts. On his résumé, Cason stated that, in addition to providing consulting support for Native American, commercial, and federal clients, he helped to “network access to government officials.”

**A** window into what has otherwise been a veiled career opened in 1989, when Cason was nominated to serve as assistant secretary for natural resources and environment at the Department of Agriculture under George H.W. Bush. Few people had ever heard of Cason, who was only 35 when his confirmation hearings took place. The position is typically filled by noncontroversial policy experts, and the hearings are rarely the stuff of high-stakes political theater. But Cason’s nomination was unusually contentious, in large part because of his former boss—James Watt, one of the most polarizing and unpopular interior secretaries ever

to hold the position.

As the DOI's head under Ronald Reagan, Watt was known for his staunch support of property rights and for his attempts to sell millions of acres of public lands to drilling and mining interests; he resigned in 1983, after stating that a coal advisory commission he'd established was balanced because it included "a black...a woman, two Jews, and a cripple." In his opening remarks at Cason's hearing, Senator Leahy wasted little time in drawing a parallel between Cason and Watt. "Frankly, we do not need a James Watt clone in this position," Leahy said. Jim Cubie, Leahy's counsel, said they'd heard from a number of sources that "this guy's going to be a disaster.... Anybody who was a Watt acolyte was trouble."

In written testimony, Cason said he'd barely gotten to know Watt and "could not fairly or knowledgeably compare or contrast our philosophies." Yet Cason revealed that his philosophy was in fact closely aligned with Watt's when he faced a series of questions about his decision to approve the transfer of tens of thousands of acres of public land at below-market rates in 1986. The episode involved the sale of oil-shale claims to energy companies at \$2.50 an acre; weeks later, some of the same land was sold to private developers at 800 times the original price, reaping a windfall of \$37 million for the energy companies. Asked by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) whether the sale was "in the public interest," Cason replied: "I think it is in the public interest to assure that we properly address private-property rights." In that single sentence, Cason summed up Watt's worldview.

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But the hearing wasn't only a referendum on Watt—it demonstrated that Cason put his own stamp on a number of decisions that heavily favored industry. Cason's involvement in the alleged suppression of a BLM report on the dangers to the spotted owl dominated press accounts of the hearings. At the time, there was great concern among conservationists that the logging of old-growth forests in Oregon would lead to the owl's demise. Indeed, several studies carried out in the 1980s demonstrated

that the forests were key to the species's survival. The BLM report commissioned by Cason found that the spotted owl would be imperiled if logging continued. Cason later claimed that the report didn't live up to the department's scientific standards—but several individuals involved in the review testified that Cason simply disagreed with their conclusions and had asked the DOI to bury the report. After news of the report leaked to the press, Cason had the DOI release what many felt was a watered-down version of the original. (“Jim Cason is a seasoned Department of the Interior official who brings decades of government, private sector, and personal experience to the position,” a DOI spokesperson wrote in response to questions about his record, including the owl report. “We are lucky to have him.”)

Cason had also pushed through a series of industry-friendly measures in the final weeks of the Reagan administration. He lowered the royalties paid for coal mined on public lands; authorized a rule that made it possible for companies to mine in national parks or on Forest Service land (a rule considered so over the top that it was quickly withdrawn); traveled to Colorado to encourage—yet again—the transfer of thousands of acres of oil-shale claims at rock-bottom prices; and brokered an agreement with several major oil and gas companies that essentially undermined the federal government's authority to audit royalty payments. Not only did Cason reach the latter deal without consulting state or tribal officials, whose constituents stood to lose out on millions in annual payments, but he also signed the agreement on letterhead from the industry's attorneys. R. Max Peterson, then the executive vice president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, described Cason's actions as “an inexcusable betrayal of the public trust.”

Even Republican members of the traditionally conservative Senate Agriculture Committee had their doubts. Summing up Cason's years at the DOI, Indiana Senator Richard Lugar said: “The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.” Several weeks later, realizing that he didn't have enough votes to secure the nomination, Cason withdrew his name.

**All** of that must have seemed like a distant memory this past summer,

when Cason addressed a roomful of industry executives at the Colorado Oil and Gas Association's annual energy summit in Denver. He spoke alongside Gale Norton, who had been the interior secretary for much of George W. Bush's administration. Cason's current post is the same one he held under Norton—but this time around, according to interviews with more than a half-dozen current and former DOI employees, he wields significantly more power. (Norton, who took a position with Royal Dutch Shell after leaving office in 2006, now runs her own consulting firm—Norton Regulatory Strategies—and works closely with the oil and gas industry.)

With a list of the summit's major sponsors—BP, Anadarko, Noble Energy—projected on the wall behind him, Cason explained that Donald Trump's win in November marked a profound shift in direction. Though few would describe the Department of the Interior, even under President Obama, as unfriendly to oil and gas producers, Cason declared that the Trump administration had inherited “an anti-energy bias” and a “preservationist thought process” that needed rooting out.

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While the DOI has often struggled to balance its dual mandate of conservation and resource development, the scales have now tipped decisively in favor of the oil and gas industry. As a candidate, Trump promised to “unleash America's \$50 trillion in untapped shale, oil, and natural-gas reserves, plus hundreds of years in clean-coal reserves”—a grandiose statement that has nonetheless become a kind of blueprint for his Department of the Interior. The long-held goal of “energy independence”—a stock phrase used by every administration at least since the Carter years—has been replaced by one of “energy dominance.” Trump officials believe that achieving it requires an aggressive push for increased access to public lands, including national monuments and offshore oil and gas reserves.

The DOI, as the largest landowner in the United States—managing roughly 500 million acres, one-fifth of the country's landmass—is at the heart of this effort. The department also administers millions of acres in offshore oil and gas reserves. Trump has already reversed an Obama-

era ban on drilling along part of the Atlantic coast and in the environmentally sensitive waters around Alaska. Now, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Republicans in Congress are seeking to fulfill one of the industry's long-sought goals: opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the largest unexplored and undeveloped onshore basin in the United States. In December, the BLM will offer approximately 10.3 million acres of land in Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve for oil and gas leasing. And next spring, the department will hold the largest oil- and gas-lease sale in the country's history when it auctions off some 77 million acres of offshore reserves in the Gulf of Mexico.

Recently, the DOI announced that it would be running its operations more like a business, with the primary objective of generating revenue through energy production. According to a July report in *Bloomberg News*, Zinke is pushing to "retool the agency into a federal profit center." The DOI's climate-change webpage has undergone a makeover, too. Sometime between February and April, the department replaced a lengthy informational page with two short paragraphs describing the DOI's preservation duties; the phrase "climate change" appears just once. And in April, the BLM—which is tasked with overseeing oil and gas leasing on federal land—changed the image on its home page from one of a couple of backpackers looking out onto a scenic landscape to a shot of a massive coal seam in Wyoming (an image that has since been removed).

In Denver, Cason reiterated that the DOI was more interested in facilitating energy development than regulating it; he told the roomful of oil and gas executives that they represented "a very important industry for the Department of Interior and the administration." About a month after the conference, the DOI submitted a draft of its strategic vision for the next five years to the Office of Management and Budget. According to a copy of the plan obtained by *The Nation*, the department's priorities include accelerating the exploitation of "vast amounts" of untapped energy reserves on public lands. The outline makes no mention of climate change—a phrase that appeared dozens of times in the previous strategic plan.

In October, the DOI released a report detailing the burdens on energy development and recommending sweeping changes that would

undermine its own basic regulatory authority. The high-profile targets included a 2015 rule requiring rudimentary safeguards for fracking on public lands, as well as a conservation plan for the imperiled sage grouse. The report also raised the possibility of eliminating the federally required land-management plans that might limit drilling in certain areas; the conditions placed on development that affects endangered species or critical habitat; and even the collection of basic data related to energy production, which critics see as an attempt to muddy an already opaque process. Jeremy Nichols of the advocacy group Wild Earth Guardians called the proposed elimination of these common-sense measures “shocking even for this administration.”

The Department of the Interior is made up of nine bureaus, including the BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service, with 70,000 employees and state and regional offices across the country. Secretary Zinke, a former Navy SEAL and one-term US congressman, has no experience managing such a large, decentralized bureaucracy, and he has relied heavily on his political appointees to run the department’s day-to-day operations. With Cason at the helm, a small circle of insiders orchestrated the aggressive deregulatory agenda and the unprecedented reshuffling of career staff.

“Cason is really an administrator,” a DOI employee who has known him since the George W. Bush administration told me. “He understands how to run an organization.” The position Cason now holds—associate deputy secretary—was created especially for him when he joined the Bush administration, most likely because of fears that he would not make it through another round of confirmation hearings. “They didn’t even try for a nomination, because they knew it would be dead on arrival,” said another former DOI employee who worked closely with Cason at the time.

In his remarks in Denver, Cason said it was evident from day one that career employees needed “an attitude adjustment.” New leadership, he continued, would force them to “adopt a different way of looking at things.” (In a recent speech before the National Petroleum Council, Interior Secretary Zinke described “30 percent” of DOI employees as “not loyal to the flag.”) As a member of the Executive Resources Board, which is responsible for senior-executive-level reassignments, Cason has

overseen a series of personnel changes that appear designed to enhance the administration's pro-oil-and-gas orientation. Under Zinke, the ERB is made up entirely of political appointees, despite strong recommendations from the Office of Personnel Management that the board include a mix of political and career employees "to provide...a balanced perspective." According to Elizabeth Klein, who occupied Cason's role in the Obama administration and served on the ERB for part of that time, there was a rough split between civil servants and political appointees.

The "Thursday-night massacre" occurred on June 15, when more than two dozen of the department's Senior Executive Service (SES) employees, from nearly every agency, received memos informing them of the reassignments. None of the employees that *The Nation* spoke with were consulted in advance, which is considered both a common courtesy and responsible management. In most cases, even agency directors were kept in the dark until just before the memos went out. When one high-level supervisor asked if they were on the list, Cason reportedly replied, "Not this round." The reassignments sent shock waves throughout the DOI. Dan Ashe, former director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said the transfers were clearly designed to disrupt the normal order of things and to undermine the authority of senior civil servants. Cason, who had served as chief human-capital officer under Bush, was intimately familiar with the SES and personally knew many of the employees who were transferred.

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Among those reassigned was Joel Clement, a senior policy adviser and widely respected climate scientist, who was moved to an accounting office overseeing royalty collection from the fossil-fuel industry. Clement later [filed a whistle-blower complaint](#) alleging that his reassignment was politically motivated; he has since resigned. In his departing letter, Clement blasted senior-level appointees for being "shackled to special interests such as oil, gas, and mining." Virginia Burkett, who oversaw climate-science research at the US Geological Survey, was transferred to an undefined advisory role in the office of the assistant secretary for

water and science; she ended up leaving the SES and returning to a lower-grade position. Cindy Dohner, the Fish and Wildlife Service's highly respected Southeast regional director, who oversaw restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP disaster, was reassigned to serve as the agency's director for international affairs. She resigned instead.

"It made people very afraid to make decisions about things or to advocate for what we would call 'good government,'" said Debra Sonderman, who was moved after almost 20 years in her role as director of acquisition and property management. Sonderman, too, has resigned.

According to numerous reports, the DOI is planning another series of reassignments. Rumors have been circulating since June that they could be announced at any time. One former DOI employee said that the list has already been compiled, but the department is waiting for the inspector general's investigation to conclude before pulling the trigger. "Everybody is looking over their shoulder," said Ashe, the former Fish and Wildlife Service director.

**Unlike other departments that have displayed a shocking level of dysfunction—a kind of embodiment of the Trump presidency itself—the DOI is operating with ruthless efficiency. This is largely due to the presence of experienced appointees like Cason and David Bernhardt, Zinke's deputy secretary, who was confirmed in late July. A former corporate lobbyist whose clients included major oil and gas producers, Bernhardt was once described by Center for Western Priorities spokesman Aaron Weiss as a "walking conflict of interest." (Cason served as acting deputy secretary until Bernhardt's nomination.)**

A handful of other DOI officials from the George W. Bush era have resurfaced after spending the past eight years working for far-right think tanks or as industry lobbyists. Doug Domenech, most recently director of the Fueling Freedom Project, which promotes "the forgotten moral case for fossil fuels," is now assistant secretary for insular affairs, coordinating policy for American territories in the South Pacific. Daniel Jorjani, a longtime adviser for several of the Koch brothers' groups, is helping to craft the department's legal policy. Scott Cameron, who spent the past several years advising a lobbying firm whose clients include Shell Oil and

the Marcellus Shale Coalition, is now overseeing the DOI's budget.

The oil and gas industry is now taking full advantage of the access offered by its allies at the department. Cason has described the DOI as having an "open-door policy," and in the first month and a half of the administration—before Zinke was even confirmed—met with top industry lawyers, corporate lobbyists, and industry trade groups, including the American Petroleum Institute and Peabody Energy. Zinke himself has had dozens of meetings with energy executives and lobbyists, including those from ExxonMobil and BP. He's used taxpayer dollars to fly on a private jet owned by an oil-and-gas-exploration firm in Wyoming, and as a member of Congress he received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the industry. So far, eight of the 12 secretarial orders he's issued have called for greater access to drilling on public lands and in offshore waters.

In June, the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA) sent a midyear legislative agenda to its board of directors, announcing that the playing field for oil and gas producers has been "dramatically altered." A copy obtained by *The Nation* shows that in just the first few months of the Trump administration, the lobbying group achieved an astonishing number of the regulatory rollbacks on its wish list, including an elimination of the fracking rule and another that would have closed a loophole allowing coal companies to calculate their own royalties on coal sold at below-market rates.

There is still a great deal that energy interests hope to accomplish during the Trump administration. Ending a rule to limit methane venting and flaring from wells is at the top of that list. Undermining protections for endangered species on federal land is another key item. A third is ensuring that future administrations are unable to finalize what the IPAA calls "harmful" air-quality regulations that it says would limit offshore development.

Kate Kelly, former senior adviser to then–Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and current director of the public-lands team at the Center for American Progress, warns that it's difficult to appreciate just how radically the DOI's policies have changed and what this means for the environment. "In

totality, what they are doing to open up public lands to oil and gas development—to basically hand the keys over to the energy industry—is pretty astounding,” she said.

Cason shares the industry’s sense of having a rare opportunity to reshape the policy landscape. In Denver, he mused that the midterm elections weren’t too far off—and that the dynamic in the Senate, and possibly even the House, could change, making it more difficult to advance a deregulatory agenda. “You think about having four years to do things,” he said, “but for those of us who have been on the federal-government side of the fence, you don’t really have four years. And if you want to effect change, you have to have a sense of urgency from day one.”

Sent from my iPhone

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**Received:** 2017-11-17T13:58:57-05:00

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**From:** Heather swift [REDACTED] (b)(6)  
**Date:** Fri, Nov 17, 2017 at 1:57 PM  
**Subject:** The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
**To:** Heather Swift <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>

<https://www.thenation.com/article/the-plot-to-sell-americas-wilderness/>

# The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness

A little-known bureaucrat named James Cason is reshaping the Department of the Interior.

By [Adam Federman](#)

Yesterday 6:00 am

Illustration by Nurul Hana Anwar.

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But the way Cason handled the meeting sent a stark message. According to two people who were present, he delivered what appeared to be hastily prepared remarks thanking Bail for her service but telling her that she was no longer needed in the position. One employee, who has since left the DOI, said it was unclear whether Bail had been told beforehand of her demotion. “It was one of the most awkward, disrespectful things I've ever seen,” the former employee said. The spectacle amounted to a kind of public dismissal—and a warning shot. The meeting ended as abruptly as it had begun, with employees left staring at their seats. By the end of the day, Bail was carrying her things out of her office in a box and looking for another place to sit.

Bail's transfer was the opening salvo in an unprecedented restructuring of the DOI. Three months later, in what some department staffers now

call the “Thursday-night massacre,” Cason sent memos to more than two dozen of the DOI’s highest-ranking civil servants informing them of reassignments; they had 15 days to accept the new positions or retire. The Office of the Inspector General is currently investigating how the transfers were determined; some employees believe they were designed to push out long-serving staff as part of a department-wide purge, and that climate scientists in particular were targeted.

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Cason is one of only a handful of political appointees with deep knowledge of the Department of the Interior. (The DOI declined to make Cason available for an interview.) He faithfully carried out the agendas of two of the most controversial interior secretaries in recent memory—James Watt and Gale Norton. From 1985 to 1989, during the Reagan administration, Cason was deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management; in that capacity, he worked closely with Steven Griles, a former coal lobbyist and the chief architect of some of the most environmentally destructive policies of the Reagan years. Griles helped to engineer the regulatory changes that facilitated mountaintop-removal mining, and he interfered with a Fish and Wildlife Service report on the potential environmental damage caused by coastal drilling. As head of the DOI's Office of Surface Mining in the early 1980s, Griles also failed to collect tens of millions of dollars in civil penalties owed by companies that had broken environmental laws.

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As the DOI’s head under Ronald Reagan, Watt was known for his staunch support of property rights and for his attempts to sell millions of acres of public lands to drilling and mining interests; he resigned in 1983, after stating that a coal advisory commission he’d established was balanced because it included “a black...a woman, two Jews, and a cripple.” In his opening remarks at Cason’s hearing, Senator Leahy wasted little time in drawing a parallel between Cason and Watt. “Frankly, we do not need a James Watt clone in this position,” Leahy said. Jim Cubie, Leahy’s counsel, said they’d heard from a number of sources that “this guy’s going to be a disaster.... Anybody who was a Watt acolyte was trouble.”

In written testimony, Cason said he’d barely gotten to know Watt and “could not fairly or knowledgeably compare or contrast our philosophies.” Yet Cason revealed that his philosophy was in fact closely aligned with Watt’s when he faced a series of questions about his decision to approve the transfer of tens of thousands of acres of public land at below-market rates in 1986. The episode involved the sale of oil-shale claims to energy companies at \$2.50 an acre; weeks later, some of the same land was sold to private developers at 800 times the original price, reaping a windfall of \$37 million for the energy companies. Asked by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) whether the sale was “in the public interest,” Cason

replied: “I think it is in the public interest to assure that we properly address private-property rights.” In that single sentence, Cason summed up Watt’s worldview.

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But the hearing wasn’t only a referendum on Watt—it demonstrated that Cason put his own stamp on a number of decisions that heavily favored industry. Cason’s involvement in the alleged suppression of a BLM report on the dangers to the spotted owl dominated press accounts of the hearings. At the time, there was great concern among conservationists that the logging of old-growth forests in Oregon would lead to the owl’s demise. Indeed, several studies carried out in the 1980s demonstrated that the forests were key to the species’s survival. The BLM report commissioned by Cason found that the spotted owl would be imperiled if logging continued. Cason later claimed that the report didn’t live up to the department’s scientific standards—but several individuals involved in the review testified that Cason simply disagreed with their conclusions and had asked the DOI to bury the report. After news of the report leaked to the press, Cason had the DOI release what many felt was a watered-down version of the original. (“Jim Cason is a seasoned Department of the Interior official who brings decades of government, private sector, and personal experience to the position,” a DOI spokesperson wrote in response to questions about his record, including the owl report. “We are lucky to have him.”)

Cason had also pushed through a series of industry-friendly measures in the final weeks of the Reagan administration. He lowered the royalties paid for coal mined on public lands; authorized a rule that made it possible for companies to mine in national parks or on Forest Service land (a rule considered so over the top that it was quickly withdrawn); traveled to Colorado to encourage—yet again—the transfer of thousands of acres of oil-shale claims at rock-bottom prices; and brokered an agreement with several major oil and gas companies that essentially undermined the federal government’s authority to audit royalty payments. Not only did Cason reach the latter deal without consulting state or tribal officials, whose constituents stood to lose out on millions in annual

payments, but he also signed the agreement on letterhead from the industry's attorneys. R. Max Peterson, then the executive vice president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, described Cason's actions as "an inexcusable betrayal of the public trust."

Even Republican members of the traditionally conservative Senate Agriculture Committee had their doubts. Summing up Cason's years at the DOI, Indiana Senator Richard Lugar said: "The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view." Several weeks later, realizing that he didn't have enough votes to secure the nomination, Cason withdrew his name.

All of that must have seemed like a distant memory this past summer, when Cason addressed a roomful of industry executives at the Colorado Oil and Gas Association's annual energy summit in Denver. He spoke alongside Gale Norton, who had been the interior secretary for much of George W. Bush's administration. Cason's current post is the same one he held under Norton—but this time around, according to interviews with more than a half-dozen current and former DOI employees, he wields significantly more power. (Norton, who took a position with Royal Dutch Shell after leaving office in 2006, now runs her own consulting firm—Norton Regulatory Strategies—and works closely with the oil and gas industry.)

With a list of the summit's major sponsors—BP, Anadarko, Noble Energy—projected on the wall behind him, Cason explained that Donald Trump's win in November marked a profound shift in direction. Though few would describe the Department of the Interior, even under President Obama, as unfriendly to oil and gas producers, Cason declared that the Trump administration had inherited "an anti-energy bias" and a "preservationist thought process" that needed rooting out.

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While the DOI has often struggled to balance its dual mandate of conservation and resource development, the scales have now tipped decisively in favor of the oil and gas industry. As a candidate, Trump promised to "unleash America's \$50 trillion in untapped shale, oil, and

natural-gas reserves, plus hundreds of years in clean-coal reserves”—a grandiose statement that has nonetheless become a kind of blueprint for his Department of the Interior. The long-held goal of “energy independence”—a stock phrase used by every administration at least since the Carter years—has been replaced by one of “energy dominance.” Trump officials believe that achieving it requires an aggressive push for increased access to public lands, including national monuments and offshore oil and gas reserves.

The DOI, as the largest landowner in the United States—managing roughly 500 million acres, one-fifth of the country’s landmass—is at the heart of this effort. The department also administers millions of acres in offshore oil and gas reserves. Trump has already reversed an Obama-era ban on drilling along part of the Atlantic coast and in the environmentally sensitive waters around Alaska. Now, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Republicans in Congress are seeking to fulfill one of the industry’s long-sought goals: opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the largest unexplored and undeveloped onshore basin in the United States. In December, the BLM will offer approximately 10.3 million acres of land in Alaska’s National Petroleum Reserve for oil and gas leasing. And next spring, the department will hold the largest oil- and gas-lease sale in the country’s history when it auctions off some 77 million acres of offshore reserves in the Gulf of Mexico.

Recently, the DOI announced that it would be running its operations more like a business, with the primary objective of generating revenue through energy production. According to a July report in *Bloomberg News*, Zinke is pushing to “retool the agency into a federal profit center.” The DOI’s climate-change webpage has undergone a makeover, too. Sometime between February and April, the department replaced a lengthy informational page with two short paragraphs describing the DOI’s preservation duties; the phrase “climate change” appears just once. And in April, the BLM—which is tasked with overseeing oil and gas leasing on federal land—changed the image on its home page from one of a couple of backpackers looking out onto a scenic landscape to a shot of a massive coal seam in Wyoming (an image that has since been removed).

In Denver, Cason reiterated that the DOI was more interested in

facilitating energy development than regulating it; he told the roomful of oil and gas executives that they represented “a very important industry for the Department of Interior and the administration.” About a month after the conference, the DOI submitted a draft of its strategic vision for the next five years to the Office of Management and Budget. According to a copy of the plan obtained by *The Nation*, the department’s priorities include accelerating the exploitation of “vast amounts” of untapped energy reserves on public lands. The outline makes no mention of climate change—a phrase that appeared dozens of times in the previous strategic plan.

In October, the DOI released a report detailing the burdens on energy development and recommending sweeping changes that would undermine its own basic regulatory authority. The high-profile targets included a 2015 rule requiring rudimentary safeguards for fracking on public lands, as well as a conservation plan for the imperiled sage grouse. The report also raised the possibility of eliminating the federally required land-management plans that might limit drilling in certain areas; the conditions placed on development that affects endangered species or critical habitat; and even the collection of basic data related to energy production, which critics see as an attempt to muddy an already opaque process. Jeremy Nichols of the advocacy group Wild Earth Guardians called the proposed elimination of these common-sense measures “shocking even for this administration.”

The Department of the Interior is made up of nine bureaus, including the BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service, with 70,000 employees and state and regional offices across the country. Secretary Zinke, a former Navy SEAL and one-term US congressman, has no experience managing such a large, decentralized bureaucracy, and he has relied heavily on his political appointees to run the department’s day-to-day operations. With Cason at the helm, a small circle of insiders orchestrated the aggressive deregulatory agenda and the unprecedented reshuffling of career staff.

“Cason is really an administrator,” a DOI employee who has known him since the George W. Bush administration told me. “He understands how to run an organization.” The position Cason now holds—associate deputy secretary—was created especially for him when he joined the Bush

administration, most likely because of fears that he would not make it through another round of confirmation hearings. “They didn’t even try for a nomination, because they knew it would be dead on arrival,” said another former DOI employee who worked closely with Cason at the time.

In his remarks in Denver, Cason said it was evident from day one that career employees needed “an attitude adjustment.” New leadership, he continued, would force them to “adopt a different way of looking at things.” (In a recent speech before the National Petroleum Council, Interior Secretary Zinke described “30 percent” of DOI employees as “not loyal to the flag.”) As a member of the Executive Resources Board, which is responsible for senior-executive-level reassignments, Cason has overseen a series of personnel changes that appear designed to enhance the administration’s pro-oil-and-gas orientation. Under Zinke, the ERB is made up entirely of political appointees, despite strong recommendations from the Office of Personnel Management that the board include a mix of political and career employees “to provide...a balanced perspective.” According to Elizabeth Klein, who occupied Cason’s role in the Obama administration and served on the ERB for part of that time, there was a rough split between civil servants and political appointees.

The “Thursday-night massacre” occurred on June 15, when more than two dozen of the department’s Senior Executive Service (SES) employees, from nearly every agency, received memos informing them of the reassignments. None of the employees that *The Nation* spoke with were consulted in advance, which is considered both a common courtesy and responsible management. In most cases, even agency directors were kept in the dark until just before the memos went out. When one high-level supervisor asked if they were on the list, Cason reportedly replied, “Not this round.” The reassignments sent shock waves throughout the DOI. Dan Ashe, former director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said the transfers were clearly designed to disrupt the normal order of things and to undermine the authority of senior civil servants. Cason, who had served as chief human-capital officer under Bush, was intimately familiar with the SES and personally knew many of the employees who were transferred.

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Among those reassigned was Joel Clement, a senior policy adviser and widely respected climate scientist, who was moved to an accounting office overseeing royalty collection from the fossil-fuel industry. Clement later [filed a whistle-blower complaint](#) alleging that his reassignment was politically motivated; he has since resigned. In his departing letter, Clement blasted senior-level appointees for being “shackled to special interests such as oil, gas, and mining.” Virginia Burkett, who oversaw climate-science research at the US Geological Survey, was transferred to an undefined advisory role in the office of the assistant secretary for water and science; she ended up leaving the SES and returning to a lower-grade position. Cindy Dohner, the Fish and Wildlife Service’s highly respected Southeast regional director, who oversaw restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP disaster, was reassigned to serve as the agency’s director for international affairs. She resigned instead.

“It made people very afraid to make decisions about things or to advocate for what we would call ‘good government,’” said Debra Sonderman, who was moved after almost 20 years in her role as director of acquisition and property management. Sonderman, too, has resigned.

According to numerous reports, the DOI is planning another series of reassignments. Rumors have been circulating since June that they could be announced at any time. One former DOI employee said that the list has already been compiled, but the department is waiting for the inspector general’s investigation to conclude before pulling the trigger. “Everybody is looking over their shoulder,” said Ashe, the former Fish and Wildlife Service director.

Unlike other departments that have displayed a shocking level of dysfunction—a kind of embodiment of the Trump presidency itself—the DOI is operating with ruthless efficiency. This is largely due to the presence of experienced appointees like Cason and David Bernhardt, Zinke’s deputy secretary, who was confirmed in late July. A former corporate lobbyist whose clients included major oil and gas producers, Bernhardt was once described by Center for Western Priorities

spokesman Aaron Weiss as a “walking conflict of interest.” (Cason served as acting deputy secretary until Bernhardt’s nomination.)

A handful of other DOI officials from the George W. Bush era have resurfaced after spending the past eight years working for far-right think tanks or as industry lobbyists. Doug Domenech, most recently director of the Fueling Freedom Project, which promotes “the forgotten moral case for fossil fuels,” is now assistant secretary for insular affairs, coordinating policy for American territories in the South Pacific. Daniel Jorjani, a longtime adviser for several of the Koch brothers’ groups, is helping to craft the department’s legal policy. Scott Cameron, who spent the past several years advising a lobbying firm whose clients include Shell Oil and the Marcellus Shale Coalition, is now overseeing the DOI’s budget.

The oil and gas industry is now taking full advantage of the access offered by its allies at the department. Cason has described the DOI as having an “open-door policy,” and in the first month and a half of the administration—before Zinke was even confirmed—met with top industry lawyers, corporate lobbyists, and industry trade groups, including the American Petroleum Institute and Peabody Energy. Zinke himself has had dozens of meetings with energy executives and lobbyists, including those from ExxonMobil and BP. He’s used taxpayer dollars to fly on a private jet owned by an oil-and-gas-exploration firm in Wyoming, and as a member of Congress he received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the industry. So far, eight of the 12 secretarial orders he’s issued have called for greater access to drilling on public lands and in offshore waters.

In June, the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA) sent a midyear legislative agenda to its board of directors, announcing that the playing field for oil and gas producers has been “dramatically altered.” A copy obtained by *The Nation* shows that in just the first few months of the Trump administration, the lobbying group achieved an astonishing number of the regulatory rollbacks on its wish list, including an elimination of the fracking rule and another that would have closed a loophole allowing coal companies to calculate their own royalties on coal sold at below-market rates.

There is still a great deal that energy interests hope to accomplish during the Trump administration. Ending a rule to limit methane venting and flaring from wells is at the top of that list. Undermining protections for endangered species on federal land is another key item. A third is ensuring that future administrations are unable to finalize what the IPAA calls “harmful” air-quality regulations that it says would limit offshore development.

Kate Kelly, former senior adviser to then–Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and current director of the public-lands team at the Center for American Progress, warns that it’s difficult to appreciate just how radically the DOI’s policies have changed and what this means for the environment. “In totality, what they are doing to open up public lands to oil and gas development—to basically hand the keys over to the energy industry—is pretty astounding,” she said.

Cason shares the industry’s sense of having a rare opportunity to reshape the policy landscape. In Denver, he mused that the midterm elections weren’t too far off—and that the dynamic in the Senate, and possibly even the House, could change, making it more difficult to advance a deregulatory agenda. “You think about having four years to do things,” he said, “but for those of us who have been on the federal-government side of the fence, you don’t really have four years. And if you want to effect change, you have to have a sense of urgency from day one.”

Sent from my iPhone

**To:** Laura Rigas[laura\_rigas@ios.doi.gov]; Russell Newell[russell\_newell@ios.doi.gov]; Magallanes, Downey[downey\_magallanes@ios.doi.gov]; David Bernhardt[(b)(6)@ios.doi.gov]; Willens, Todd[todd\_willens@ios.doi.gov]; Scott Hommel[scott\_hommel@ios.doi.gov]; James Cason[james\_cason@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Swift, Heather  
**Sent:** 2017-11-17T14:02:50-05:00  
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**Received:** 2017-11-17T14:03:37-05:00

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# The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness

A little-known bureaucrat named James Cason is reshaping the Department of the Interior.

By [Adam Federman](#)

Yesterday 6:00 am

Illustration by Nurul Hana Anwar.

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One day in Mid-March, James Cason, the associate deputy secretary at the Department of the Interior, convened an impromptu meeting of the senior staff of the Bureau of Land Management. Cason, whose office is on the sixth floor, rarely wandered the halls, and some career civil servants still had never met him. A soft-spoken and unassuming man, Cason has cycled in and out of Republican administrations since the early 1980s and has largely avoided public attention. But people who have worked with him know him as a highly effective administrator and a

disciple of some of the department's most notorious anti-environment leaders in previous years—a “hatchet man,” in the words of one former DOI employee who worked with him during the George W. Bush administration.

*This article was reported in partnership with the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute.*

About 30 employees were ushered into a conference room, where Cason announced that Kristin Bail, acting director of the BLM, would be replaced by Mike Nedd. The move itself wasn't all that surprising: Bail, who came from a conservation background, had been appointed in the final days of the Obama administration to serve in a temporary capacity; Nedd, who had been assistant director for energy, minerals, and realty management since 2007, was viewed as better positioned to implement the new administration's pro-industry agenda.

But the way Cason handled the meeting sent a stark message. According to two people who were present, he delivered what appeared to be hastily prepared remarks thanking Bail for her service but telling her that she was no longer needed in the position. One employee, who has since left the DOI, said it was unclear whether Bail had been told beforehand of her demotion. “It was one of the most awkward, disrespectful things I've ever seen,” the former employee said. The spectacle amounted to a kind of public dismissal—and a warning shot. The meeting ended as abruptly as it had begun, with employees left staring at their seats. By the end of the day, Bail was carrying her things out of her office in a box and looking for another place to sit.

Bail's transfer was the opening salvo in an unprecedented restructuring of the DOI. Three months later, in what some department staffers now call the “Thursday-night massacre,” Cason sent memos to more than two dozen of the DOI's highest-ranking civil servants informing them of reassignments; they had 15 days to accept the new positions or retire. The Office of the Inspector General is currently investigating how the transfers were determined; some employees believe they were designed to push out long-serving staff as part of a department-wide purge, and that climate scientists in particular were targeted.

Cason, who once described himself as the department's "regulatory czar," has also overseen the dismantling of rules governing energy development on public lands. The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining—from Utah's red-rock country to the frigid, perilous waters off Alaska's coast—while stripping away basic environmental protections and reducing transparency. Across the Trump administration, the new mantra is "energy dominance"—a vision of the world in which the United States will amplify its influence with a dramatic expansion of oil, gas, and coal production, whatever the environmental costs.

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The axing of regulations and personnel is occurring with remarkable speed. In contrast to other federal departments mired by inept leadership in the Trump era, a small group of seasoned insiders has kept things humming along at the Department of the Interior, Cason chief among them. In the early months of the administration, according to one former DOI employee, there seemed to be few decisions, no matter how small, that didn't cross his desk.

"From what I can tell, Jim Cason is running the show," the former employee said. "I think he's overseeing everything." In addition to orchestrating the personnel reassignments and chairing the regulatory-reform task force that has rewritten or eliminated many Obama-era policies, Cason has been tasked with reviewing every grant or cooperative agreement of \$100,000 or more, as well as any pending decisions with "nationwide, regional, or statewide impact." He wrote the *Federal Register* notice announcing the department's controversial review of 27 national monuments, and he has been granted virtual *carte blanche* to set policy as it relates to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Cason's return to the DOI doesn't surprise Jim Cubie, who was chief counsel to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) in 1989, when Leahy oversaw an Agriculture Committee hearing on Cason's nomination to a top environmental post in the George H.W. Bush administration. Cason's

track record so alarmed the committee that he was eventually forced to withdraw his name from consideration. Now he's back in a position that doesn't require Senate approval. "He'll do a lot of damage," Cubie predicted.

Cason is one of only a handful of political appointees with deep knowledge of the Department of the Interior. (The DOI declined to make Cason available for an interview.) He faithfully carried out the agendas of two of the most controversial interior secretaries in recent memory—James Watt and Gale Norton. From 1985 to 1989, during the Reagan administration, Cason was deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management; in that capacity, he worked closely with Steven Griles, a former coal lobbyist and the chief architect of some of the most environmentally destructive policies of the Reagan years. Griles helped to engineer the regulatory changes that facilitated mountaintop-removal mining, and he interfered with a Fish and Wildlife Service report on the potential environmental damage caused by coastal drilling. As head of the DOI's Office of Surface Mining in the early 1980s, Griles also failed to collect tens of millions of dollars in civil penalties owed by companies that had broken environmental laws.

Throughout this period, Cason served as Griles's right-hand man, according to a former congressional staffer familiar with his record. "He learned well at Griles's knee about how to get stuff done," the staffer said. The two became close friends; Griles was best man at Cason's wedding in 1990. And in 2001, when Griles returned to the department under George W. Bush after more than a decade of lobbying for coal companies and other special interests, Cason joined him as his associate deputy. According to a former DOI employee who worked with Cason during the Bush administration, "Griles would have whatever idea, and Jim would figure out how to get it implemented. He's quite effective at doing that. He was known as Griles's hatchet man."

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Cason had also pushed through a series of industry-friendly measures in the final weeks of the Reagan administration. He lowered the royalties paid for coal mined on public lands; authorized a rule that made it possible for companies to mine in national parks or on Forest Service land (a rule considered so over the top that it was quickly withdrawn); traveled to Colorado to encourage—yet again—the transfer of thousands of acres of oil-shale claims at rock-bottom prices; and brokered an agreement with several major oil and gas companies that essentially undermined the federal government's authority to audit royalty payments. Not only did Cason reach the latter deal without consulting state or tribal officials, whose constituents stood to lose out on millions in annual payments, but he also signed the agreement on letterhead from the industry's attorneys. R. Max Peterson, then the executive vice president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, described Cason's actions as “an inexcusable betrayal of the public trust.”

Even Republican members of the traditionally conservative Senate Agriculture Committee had their doubts. Summing up Cason's years at the DOI, Indiana Senator Richard Lugar said: “The whole department,

and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.” Several weeks later, realizing that he didn’t have enough votes to secure the nomination, Cason withdrew his name.

**All** of that must have seemed like a distant memory this past summer, when Cason addressed a roomful of industry executives at the Colorado Oil and Gas Association’s annual energy summit in Denver. He spoke alongside Gale Norton, who had been the interior secretary for much of George W. Bush’s administration. Cason’s current post is the same one he held under Norton—but this time around, according to interviews with more than a half-dozen current and former DOI employees, he wields significantly more power. (Norton, who took a position with Royal Dutch Shell after leaving office in 2006, now runs her own consulting firm—Norton Regulatory Strategies—and works closely with the oil and gas industry.)

With a list of the summit’s major sponsors—BP, Anadarko, Noble Energy—projected on the wall behind him, Cason explained that Donald Trump’s win in November marked a profound shift in direction. Though few would describe the Department of the Interior, even under President Obama, as unfriendly to oil and gas producers, Cason declared that the Trump administration had inherited “an anti-energy bias” and a “preservationist thought process” that needed rooting out.

**“There’s not a lot of flash. He works long hours—whatever it takes.”**

While the DOI has often struggled to balance its dual mandate of conservation and resource development, the scales have now tipped decisively in favor of the oil and gas industry. As a candidate, Trump promised to “unleash America’s \$50 trillion in untapped shale, oil, and natural-gas reserves, plus hundreds of years in clean-coal reserves”—a grandiose statement that has nonetheless become a kind of blueprint for his Department of the Interior. The long-held goal of “energy independence”—a stock phrase used by every administration at least since the Carter years—has been replaced by one of “energy dominance.” Trump officials believe that achieving it requires an aggressive push for increased access to public lands, including national

monuments and offshore oil and gas reserves.

The DOI, as the largest landowner in the United States—managing roughly 500 million acres, one-fifth of the country’s landmass—is at the heart of this effort. The department also administers millions of acres in offshore oil and gas reserves. Trump has already reversed an Obama-era ban on drilling along part of the Atlantic coast and in the environmentally sensitive waters around Alaska. Now, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Republicans in Congress are seeking to fulfill one of the industry’s long-sought goals: opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the largest unexplored and undeveloped onshore basin in the United States. In December, the BLM will offer approximately 10.3 million acres of land in Alaska’s National Petroleum Reserve for oil and gas leasing. And next spring, the department will hold the largest oil- and gas-lease sale in the country’s history when it auctions off some 77 million acres of offshore reserves in the Gulf of Mexico.

Recently, the DOI announced that it would be running its operations more like a business, with the primary objective of generating revenue through energy production. According to a July report in *Bloomberg News*, Zinke is pushing to “retool the agency into a federal profit center.” The DOI’s climate-change webpage has undergone a makeover, too. Sometime between February and April, the department replaced a lengthy informational page with two short paragraphs describing the DOI’s preservation duties; the phrase “climate change” appears just once. And in April, the BLM—which is tasked with overseeing oil and gas leasing on federal land—changed the image on its home page from one of a couple of backpackers looking out onto a scenic landscape to a shot of a massive coal seam in Wyoming (an image that has since been removed).

In Denver, Cason reiterated that the DOI was more interested in facilitating energy development than regulating it; he told the roomful of oil and gas executives that they represented “a very important industry for the Department of Interior and the administration.” About a month after the conference, the DOI submitted a draft of its strategic vision for the next five years to the Office of Management and Budget. According to a copy of the plan obtained by *The Nation*, the department’s priorities include accelerating the exploitation of “vast amounts” of untapped

energy reserves on public lands. The outline makes no mention of climate change—a phrase that appeared dozens of times in the previous strategic plan.

In October, the DOI released a report detailing the burdens on energy development and recommending sweeping changes that would undermine its own basic regulatory authority. The high-profile targets included a 2015 rule requiring rudimentary safeguards for fracking on public lands, as well as a conservation plan for the imperiled sage grouse. The report also raised the possibility of eliminating the federally required land-management plans that might limit drilling in certain areas; the conditions placed on development that affects endangered species or critical habitat; and even the collection of basic data related to energy production, which critics see as an attempt to muddy an already opaque process. Jeremy Nichols of the advocacy group Wild Earth Guardians called the proposed elimination of these common-sense measures “shocking even for this administration.”

The Department of the Interior is made up of nine bureaus, including the BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service, with 70,000 employees and state and regional offices across the country. Secretary Zinke, a former Navy SEAL and one-term US congressman, has no experience managing such a large, decentralized bureaucracy, and he has relied heavily on his political appointees to run the department’s day-to-day operations. With Cason at the helm, a small circle of insiders orchestrated the aggressive deregulatory agenda and the unprecedented reshuffling of career staff.

“Cason is really an administrator,” a DOI employee who has known him since the George W. Bush administration told me. “He understands how to run an organization.” The position Cason now holds—associate deputy secretary—was created especially for him when he joined the Bush administration, most likely because of fears that he would not make it through another round of confirmation hearings. “They didn’t even try for a nomination, because they knew it would be dead on arrival,” said another former DOI employee who worked closely with Cason at the time.

In his remarks in Denver, Cason said it was evident from day one that

career employees needed “an attitude adjustment.” New leadership, he continued, would force them to “adopt a different way of looking at things.” (In a recent speech before the National Petroleum Council, Interior Secretary Zinke described “30 percent” of DOI employees as “not loyal to the flag.”) As a member of the Executive Resources Board, which is responsible for senior-executive-level reassignments, Cason has overseen a series of personnel changes that appear designed to enhance the administration’s pro-oil-and-gas orientation. Under Zinke, the ERB is made up entirely of political appointees, despite strong recommendations from the Office of Personnel Management that the board include a mix of political and career employees “to provide...a balanced perspective.” According to Elizabeth Klein, who occupied Cason’s role in the Obama administration and served on the ERB for part of that time, there was a rough split between civil servants and political appointees.

The “Thursday-night massacre” occurred on June 15, when more than two dozen of the department’s Senior Executive Service (SES) employees, from nearly every agency, received memos informing them of the reassignments. None of the employees that *The Nation* spoke with were consulted in advance, which is considered both a common courtesy and responsible management. In most cases, even agency directors were kept in the dark until just before the memos went out. When one high-level supervisor asked if they were on the list, Cason reportedly replied, “Not this round.” The reassignments sent shock waves throughout the DOI. Dan Ashe, former director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said the transfers were clearly designed to disrupt the normal order of things and to undermine the authority of senior civil servants. Cason, who had served as chief human-capital officer under Bush, was intimately familiar with the SES and personally knew many of the employees who were transferred.

**“What they are doing to hand the keys over to the energy industry is pretty astounding.”**

Among those reassigned was Joel Clement, a senior policy adviser and widely respected climate scientist, who was moved to an accounting office overseeing royalty collection from the fossil-fuel industry. Clement

later filed a whistle-blower complaint alleging that his reassignment was politically motivated; he has since resigned. In his departing letter, Clement blasted senior-level appointees for being “shackled to special interests such as oil, gas, and mining.” Virginia Burkett, who oversaw climate-science research at the US Geological Survey, was transferred to an undefined advisory role in the office of the assistant secretary for water and science; she ended up leaving the SES and returning to a lower-grade position. Cindy Dohner, the Fish and Wildlife Service’s highly respected Southeast regional director, who oversaw restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP disaster, was reassigned to serve as the agency’s director for international affairs. She resigned instead.

“It made people very afraid to make decisions about things or to advocate for what we would call ‘good government,’” said Debra Sonderman, who was moved after almost 20 years in her role as director of acquisition and property management. Sonderman, too, has resigned.

According to numerous reports, the DOI is planning another series of reassignments. Rumors have been circulating since June that they could be announced at any time. One former DOI employee said that the list has already been compiled, but the department is waiting for the inspector general’s investigation to conclude before pulling the trigger. “Everybody is looking over their shoulder,” said Ashe, the former Fish and Wildlife Service director.

**Unlike other departments that have displayed a shocking level of dysfunction—a kind of embodiment of the Trump presidency itself—the DOI is operating with ruthless efficiency. This is largely due to the presence of experienced appointees like Cason and David Bernhardt, Zinke’s deputy secretary, who was confirmed in late July. A former corporate lobbyist whose clients included major oil and gas producers, Bernhardt was once described by Center for Western Priorities spokesman Aaron Weiss as a “walking conflict of interest.” (Cason served as acting deputy secretary until Bernhardt’s nomination.)**

A handful of other DOI officials from the George W. Bush era have resurfaced after spending the past eight years working for far-right think tanks or as industry lobbyists. Doug Domenech, most recently director of

the Fueling Freedom Project, which promotes “the forgotten moral case for fossil fuels,” is now assistant secretary for insular affairs, coordinating policy for American territories in the South Pacific. Daniel Jorjani, a longtime adviser for several of the Koch brothers’ groups, is helping to craft the department’s legal policy. Scott Cameron, who spent the past several years advising a lobbying firm whose clients include Shell Oil and the Marcellus Shale Coalition, is now overseeing the DOI’s budget.

The oil and gas industry is now taking full advantage of the access offered by its allies at the department. Cason has described the DOI as having an “open-door policy,” and in the first month and a half of the administration—before Zinke was even confirmed—met with top industry lawyers, corporate lobbyists, and industry trade groups, including the American Petroleum Institute and Peabody Energy. Zinke himself has had dozens of meetings with energy executives and lobbyists, including those from ExxonMobil and BP. He’s used taxpayer dollars to fly on a private jet owned by an oil-and-gas-exploration firm in Wyoming, and as a member of Congress he received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the industry. So far, eight of the 12 secretarial orders he’s issued have called for greater access to drilling on public lands and in offshore waters.

In June, the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA) sent a midyear legislative agenda to its board of directors, announcing that the playing field for oil and gas producers has been “dramatically altered.” A copy obtained by *The Nation* shows that in just the first few months of the Trump administration, the lobbying group achieved an astonishing number of the regulatory rollbacks on its wish list, including an elimination of the fracking rule and another that would have closed a loophole allowing coal companies to calculate their own royalties on coal sold at below-market rates.

There is still a great deal that energy interests hope to accomplish during the Trump administration. Ending a rule to limit methane venting and flaring from wells is at the top of that list. Undermining protections for endangered species on federal land is another key item. A third is ensuring that future administrations are unable to finalize what the IPAA calls “harmful” air-quality regulations that it says would limit offshore

development.

Kate Kelly, former senior adviser to then–Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and current director of the public-lands team at the Center for American Progress, warns that it’s difficult to appreciate just how radically the DOI’s policies have changed and what this means for the environment. “In totality, what they are doing to open up public lands to oil and gas development—to basically hand the keys over to the energy industry—is pretty astounding,” she said.

Cason shares the industry’s sense of having a rare opportunity to reshape the policy landscape. In Denver, he mused that the midterm elections weren’t too far off—and that the dynamic in the Senate, and possibly even the House, could change, making it more difficult to advance a deregulatory agenda. “You think about having four years to do things,” he said, “but for those of us who have been on the federal-government side of the fence, you don’t really have four years. And if you want to effect change, you have to have a sense of urgency from day one.”

Sent from my iPhone

To: johncason [REDACTED] (b)(6) [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] (b)(6) [REDACTED]@gmail.com]; Connor Cason [REDACTED] (b)(6) [REDACTED]  
From: Cason, James  
Sent: 2017-11-17T14:57:47-05:00  
Importance: Normal  
Subject: Fwd: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
Received: 2017-11-17T14:58:25-05:00

FYI. A current article pointing out my "evil" side. See attachment below.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Swift, Heather** <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>  
Date: Fri, Nov 17, 2017 at 1:58 PM  
Subject: Fwd: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
To: James Cason <[james\\_cason@ios.doi.gov](mailto:james_cason@ios.doi.gov)>

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Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
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[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

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From: **Heather swift** [REDACTED] (b)(6) [REDACTED] >  
Date: Fri, Nov 17, 2017 at 1:57 PM  
Subject: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
To: Heather Swift <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>

<https://www.thenation.com/article/the-plot-to-sell-americas-wilderness/>

## The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness

A little-known bureaucrat named James Cason  
is reshaping the Department of the Interior.

By [Adam Federman](#)  
Yesterday 6:00 am

Illustration by Nurul Hana Anwar.

### **Feeling overwhelmed?**

Sign up for Take Action Now, our newsletter that connects busy people to the resistance.

One day in Mid-March, James Cason, the associate deputy secretary at the Department of the Interior, convened an impromptu meeting of the senior staff of the Bureau of Land Management. Cason, whose office is on the sixth floor, rarely wandered the halls, and some career civil servants still had never met him. A soft-spoken and unassuming man, Cason has cycled in and out of Republican administrations since the early 1980s and has largely avoided public attention. But people who have worked with him know him as a highly effective administrator and a disciple of some of the department's most notorious anti-environment leaders in previous years—a “hatchet man,” in the words of one former DOI employee who worked with him during the George W. Bush administration.

*This article was reported in partnership with the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute.*

About 30 employees were ushered into a conference room, where Cason announced that Kristin Bail, acting director of the BLM, would be replaced by Mike Nedd. The move itself wasn't all that surprising: Bail, who came from a conservation background, had been appointed in the final days of the Obama administration to serve in a temporary capacity; Nedd, who had been assistant director for energy, minerals, and realty management since 2007, was viewed as better positioned to implement the new administration's pro-industry agenda.

But the way Cason handled the meeting sent a stark message. According to two people who were present, he delivered what appeared to be hastily prepared remarks thanking Bail for her service but telling her that she was no longer needed in the position. One employee, who has since left the DOI, said it was unclear whether Bail had been told beforehand of her demotion. “It was one of the most awkward, disrespectful things I've ever seen,” the former employee said. The spectacle amounted to a kind

of public dismissal—and a warning shot. The meeting ended as abruptly as it had begun, with employees left staring at their seats. By the end of the day, Bail was carrying her things out of her office in a box and looking for another place to sit.

Bail's transfer was the opening salvo in an unprecedented restructuring of the DOI. Three months later, in what some department staffers now call the "Thursday-night massacre," Cason sent memos to more than two dozen of the DOI's highest-ranking civil servants informing them of reassignments; they had 15 days to accept the new positions or retire. The Office of the Inspector General is currently investigating how the transfers were determined; some employees believe they were designed to push out long-serving staff as part of a department-wide purge, and that climate scientists in particular were targeted.

Cason, who once described himself as the department's "regulatory czar," has also overseen the dismantling of rules governing energy development on public lands. The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining—from Utah's red-rock country to the frigid, perilous waters off Alaska's coast—while stripping away basic environmental protections and reducing transparency. Across the Trump administration, the new mantra is "energy dominance"—a vision of the world in which the United States will amplify its influence with a dramatic expansion of oil, gas, and coal production, whatever the environmental costs.

**The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining, from Utah's red-rock country to Alaska's frigid coastal waters.**

The axing of regulations and personnel is occurring with remarkable speed. In contrast to other federal departments mired by inept leadership in the Trump era, a small group of seasoned insiders has kept things humming along at the Department of the Interior, Cason chief among them. In the early months of the administration, according to one former DOI employee, there seemed to be few decisions, no matter how small, that didn't cross his desk.

"From what I can tell, Jim Cason is running the show," the former

employee said. "I think he's overseeing everything." In addition to orchestrating the personnel reassignments and chairing the regulatory-reform task force that has rewritten or eliminated many Obama-era policies, Cason has been tasked with reviewing every grant or cooperative agreement of \$100,000 or more, as well as any pending decisions with "nationwide, regional, or statewide impact." He wrote the *Federal Register* notice announcing the department's controversial review of 27 national monuments, and he has been granted virtual *carte blanche* to set policy as it relates to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Cason's return to the DOI doesn't surprise Jim Cubie, who was chief counsel to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) in 1989, when Leahy oversaw [an Agriculture Committee hearing](#) on Cason's nomination to a top environmental post in the George H.W. Bush administration. Cason's track record so alarmed the committee that he was eventually forced to withdraw his name from consideration. Now he's back in a position that doesn't require Senate approval. "He'll do a lot of damage," Cubie predicted.

**C**ason is one of only a handful of political appointees with deep knowledge of the Department of the Interior. (The DOI declined to make Cason available for an interview.) He faithfully carried out the agendas of two of the most controversial interior secretaries in recent memory—James Watt and Gale Norton. From 1985 to 1989, during the Reagan administration, Cason was deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management; in that capacity, he worked closely with Steven Griles, a former coal lobbyist and the chief architect of some of the most environmentally destructive policies of the Reagan years. Griles helped to engineer the regulatory changes that facilitated mountaintop-removal mining, and he interfered with a Fish and Wildlife Service report on the potential environmental damage caused by coastal drilling. As head of the DOI's Office of Surface Mining in the early 1980s, Griles also failed to collect tens of millions of dollars in civil penalties owed by companies that had broken environmental laws.

Throughout this period, Cason served as Griles's right-hand man, according to a former congressional staffer familiar with his record. "He learned well at Griles's knee about how to get stuff done," the staffer

said. The two became close friends; Griles was best man at Cason's wedding in 1990. And in 2001, when Griles returned to the department under George W. Bush after more than a decade of lobbying for coal companies and other special interests, Cason joined him as his associate deputy. According to a former DOI employee who worked with Cason during the Bush administration, "Griles would have whatever idea, and Jim would figure out how to get it implemented. He's quite effective at doing that. He was known as Griles's hatchet man."

But unlike Griles, who was sentenced to 10 months in prison after lying to Congress about his ties to the disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, Cason has largely avoided the public eye. His personal style is exceedingly restrained, particularly in contrast with more flamboyant and controversial colleagues like Griles, who was known for being a brash talker with a volatile temper. Cason has a monotone way of speaking; he often dresses in a subdued blue suit and tie and seems to go out of his way to be agreeable. In an [appearance on C-SPAN](#) in 2005, as the Abramoff investigations were gaining momentum, a caller described Cason as a "Republican toady" and attacked the DOI for its policies toward Native Americans. Cason replied evenly, "OK, well, that's certainly a good point of view too."

Even when not behind the scenes at the DOI, Cason maintained a low profile. He's never worked as a registered lobbyist. During the Clinton administration, he lived in Western New York and was vice president of risk management at a company that manufactures ceramic-fiber products for industrial applications. More recently, he's done consulting work for Booz Allen Hamilton and Kelly Anderson & Associates (now KAA Federal Solutions), a business-management firm that works with federal and industrial clients. On his financial-disclosure form, submitted in July, Cason provided so few details about the contracting work he'd done with the Quapaw tribe in Oklahoma that, after queries by ProPublica, the DOI was forced to submit a revised version. In it, [Cason revealed](#) that over a five-month period in 2016, he'd earned \$50,000 doing "research" for the tribe. (The department's ethics lawyer called the omission an "oversight.")

KAA chief executive officer Tim Vigotsky, who hired Cason in 2012, describes him as a policy wonk who knows the DOI better than anyone.

“There’s not a lot of flash,” Vigotsky said. “He works long hours—whatever it takes.” Because Cason wasn’t registered as a lobbyist at Booz Allen or Kelly Anderson, it’s unclear who his clients in the energy sector might have been. Vigotsky called Kelly Anderson’s list a “who’s who” of the industry but wouldn’t reveal the names of private clients. Much of the firm’s work involves providing assistance to companies seeking federal contracts. On his résumé, Cason stated that, in addition to providing consulting support for Native American, commercial, and federal clients, he helped to “network access to government officials.”

A window into what has otherwise been a veiled career opened in 1989, when Cason was nominated to serve as assistant secretary for natural resources and environment at the Department of Agriculture under George H.W. Bush. Few people had ever heard of Cason, who was only 35 when his confirmation hearings took place. The position is typically filled by noncontroversial policy experts, and the hearings are rarely the stuff of high-stakes political theater. But Cason’s nomination was unusually contentious, in large part because of his former boss—James Watt, one of the most polarizing and unpopular interior secretaries ever to hold the position.

As the DOI’s head under Ronald Reagan, Watt was known for his staunch support of property rights and for his attempts to sell millions of acres of public lands to drilling and mining interests; he resigned in 1983, after stating that a coal advisory commission he’d established was balanced because it included “a black...a woman, two Jews, and a cripple.” In his opening remarks at Cason’s hearing, Senator Leahy wasted little time in drawing a parallel between Cason and Watt. “Frankly, we do not need a James Watt clone in this position,” Leahy said. Jim Cubie, Leahy’s counsel, said they’d heard from a number of sources that “this guy’s going to be a disaster.... Anybody who was a Watt acolyte was trouble.”

In written testimony, Cason said he’d barely gotten to know Watt and “could not fairly or knowledgeably compare or contrast our philosophies.” Yet Cason revealed that his philosophy was in fact closely aligned with Watt’s when he faced a series of questions about his decision to approve

the transfer of tens of thousands of acres of public land at below-market rates in 1986. The episode involved the sale of oil-shale claims to energy companies at \$2.50 an acre; weeks later, some of the same land was sold to private developers at 800 times the original price, reaping a windfall of \$37 million for the energy companies. Asked by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) whether the sale was “in the public interest,” Cason replied: “I think it is in the public interest to assure that we properly address private-property rights.” In that single sentence, Cason summed up Watt’s worldview.

**“The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.”**

But the hearing wasn’t only a referendum on Watt—it demonstrated that Cason put his own stamp on a number of decisions that heavily favored industry. Cason’s involvement in the alleged suppression of a BLM report on the dangers to the spotted owl dominated press accounts of the hearings. At the time, there was great concern among conservationists that the logging of old-growth forests in Oregon would lead to the owl’s demise. Indeed, several studies carried out in the 1980s demonstrated that the forests were key to the species’s survival. The BLM report commissioned by Cason found that the spotted owl would be imperiled if logging continued. Cason later claimed that the report didn’t live up to the department’s scientific standards—but several individuals involved in the review testified that Cason simply disagreed with their conclusions and had asked the DOI to bury the report. After news of the report leaked to the press, Cason had the DOI release what many felt was a watered-down version of the original. (“Jim Cason is a seasoned Department of the Interior official who brings decades of government, private sector, and personal experience to the position,” a DOI spokesperson wrote in response to questions about his record, including the owl report. “We are lucky to have him.”)

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traveled to Colorado to encourage—yet again—the transfer of thousands of acres of oil-shale claims at rock-bottom prices; and brokered an agreement with several major oil and gas companies that essentially undermined the federal government’s authority to audit royalty payments. Not only did Cason reach the latter deal without consulting state or tribal officials, whose constituents stood to lose out on millions in annual payments, but he also signed the agreement on letterhead from the industry’s attorneys. R. Max Peterson, then the executive vice president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, described Cason’s actions as “an inexcusable betrayal of the public trust.”

Even Republican members of the traditionally conservative Senate Agriculture Committee had their doubts. Summing up Cason’s years at the DOI, Indiana Senator Richard Lugar said: “The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.” Several weeks later, realizing that he didn’t have enough votes to secure the nomination, Cason withdrew his name.

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In Denver, Cason reiterated that the DOI was more interested in facilitating energy development than regulating it; he told the roomful of oil and gas executives that they represented “a very important industry for the Department of Interior and the administration.” About a month after the conference, the DOI submitted a draft of its strategic vision for the next five years to the Office of Management and Budget. According to a copy of the plan obtained by *The Nation*, the department’s priorities include accelerating the exploitation of “vast amounts” of untapped energy reserves on public lands. The outline makes no mention of climate change—a phrase that appeared dozens of times in the previous strategic plan.

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The Department of the Interior is made up of nine bureaus, including the BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service, with 70,000 employees and state and regional offices across the country. Secretary Zinke, a former Navy SEAL and one-term US congressman, has no experience managing such a large, decentralized bureaucracy, and he has relied heavily on his political appointees to run the department’s day-to-day operations. With Cason at the helm, a small circle of insiders orchestrated the aggressive

deregulatory agenda and the unprecedented reshuffling of career staff.

“Cason is really an administrator,” a DOI employee who has known him since the George W. Bush administration told me. “He understands how to run an organization.” The position Cason now holds—associate deputy secretary—was created especially for him when he joined the Bush administration, most likely because of fears that he would not make it through another round of confirmation hearings. “They didn’t even try for a nomination, because they knew it would be dead on arrival,” said another former DOI employee who worked closely with Cason at the time.

In his remarks in Denver, Cason said it was evident from day one that career employees needed “an attitude adjustment.” New leadership, he continued, would force them to “adopt a different way of looking at things.” (In a recent speech before the National Petroleum Council, Interior Secretary Zinke described “30 percent” of DOI employees as “not loyal to the flag.”) As a member of the Executive Resources Board, which is responsible for senior-executive-level reassignments, Cason has overseen a series of personnel changes that appear designed to enhance the administration’s pro-oil-and-gas orientation. Under Zinke, the ERB is made up entirely of political appointees, despite strong recommendations from the Office of Personnel Management that the board include a mix of political and career employees “to provide...a balanced perspective.” According to Elizabeth Klein, who occupied Cason’s role in the Obama administration and served on the ERB for part of that time, there was a rough split between civil servants and political appointees.

The “Thursday-night massacre” occurred on June 15, when more than two dozen of the department’s Senior Executive Service (SES) employees, from nearly every agency, received memos informing them of the reassignments. None of the employees that *The Nation* spoke with were consulted in advance, which is considered both a common courtesy and responsible management. In most cases, even agency directors were kept in the dark until just before the memos went out. When one high-level supervisor asked if they were on the list, Cason reportedly replied, “Not this round.” The reassignments sent shock waves

throughout the DOI. Dan Ashe, former director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said the transfers were clearly designed to disrupt the normal order of things and to undermine the authority of senior civil servants. Cason, who had served as chief human-capital officer under Bush, was intimately familiar with the SES and personally knew many of the employees who were transferred.

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Among those reassigned was Joel Clement, a senior policy adviser and widely respected climate scientist, who was moved to an accounting office overseeing royalty collection from the fossil-fuel industry. Clement later [filed a whistle-blower complaint](#) alleging that his reassignment was politically motivated; he has since resigned. In his departing letter, Clement blasted senior-level appointees for being “shackled to special interests such as oil, gas, and mining.” Virginia Burkett, who oversaw climate-science research at the US Geological Survey, was transferred to an undefined advisory role in the office of the assistant secretary for water and science; she ended up leaving the SES and returning to a lower-grade position. Cindy Dohner, the Fish and Wildlife Service’s highly respected Southeast regional director, who oversaw restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP disaster, was reassigned to serve as the agency’s director for international affairs. She resigned instead.

“It made people very afraid to make decisions about things or to advocate for what we would call ‘good government,’” said Debra Sonderman, who was moved after almost 20 years in her role as director of acquisition and property management. Sonderman, too, has resigned.

According to numerous reports, the DOI is planning another series of reassignments. Rumors have been circulating since June that they could be announced at any time. One former DOI employee said that the list has already been compiled, but the department is waiting for the inspector general’s investigation to conclude before pulling the trigger. “Everybody is looking over their shoulder,” said Ashe, the former Fish and Wildlife Service director.

**Unlike other departments that have displayed a shocking level of**

dysfunction—a kind of embodiment of the Trump presidency itself—the DOI is operating with ruthless efficiency. This is largely due to the presence of experienced appointees like Cason and David Bernhardt, Zinke’s deputy secretary, who was confirmed in late July. A former corporate lobbyist whose clients included major oil and gas producers, Bernhardt was once described by Center for Western Priorities spokesman Aaron Weiss as a “walking conflict of interest.” (Cason served as acting deputy secretary until Bernhardt’s nomination.)

A handful of other DOI officials from the George W. Bush era have resurfaced after spending the past eight years working for far-right think tanks or as industry lobbyists. Doug Domenech, most recently director of the Fueling Freedom Project, which promotes “the forgotten moral case for fossil fuels,” is now assistant secretary for insular affairs, coordinating policy for American territories in the South Pacific. Daniel Jorjani, a longtime adviser for several of the Koch brothers’ groups, is helping to craft the department’s legal policy. Scott Cameron, who spent the past several years advising a lobbying firm whose clients include Shell Oil and the Marcellus Shale Coalition, is now overseeing the DOI’s budget.

The oil and gas industry is now taking full advantage of the access offered by its allies at the department. Cason has described the DOI as having an “open-door policy,” and in the first month and a half of the administration—before Zinke was even confirmed—met with top industry lawyers, corporate lobbyists, and industry trade groups, including the American Petroleum Institute and Peabody Energy. Zinke himself has had dozens of meetings with energy executives and lobbyists, including those from ExxonMobil and BP. He’s used taxpayer dollars to fly on a private jet owned by an oil-and-gas-exploration firm in Wyoming, and as a member of Congress he received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the industry. So far, eight of the 12 secretarial orders he’s issued have called for greater access to drilling on public lands and in offshore waters.

In June, the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA) sent a midyear legislative agenda to its board of directors, announcing that the playing field for oil and gas producers has been “dramatically altered.” A copy obtained by *The Nation* shows that in just the first few months of the

Trump administration, the lobbying group achieved an astonishing number of the regulatory rollbacks on its wish list, including an elimination of the fracking rule and another that would have closed a loophole allowing coal companies to calculate their own royalties on coal sold at below-market rates.

There is still a great deal that energy interests hope to accomplish during the Trump administration. Ending a rule to limit methane venting and flaring from wells is at the top of that list. Undermining protections for endangered species on federal land is another key item. A third is ensuring that future administrations are unable to finalize what the IPAA calls “harmful” air-quality regulations that it says would limit offshore development.

Kate Kelly, former senior adviser to then–Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and current director of the public-lands team at the Center for American Progress, warns that it’s difficult to appreciate just how radically the DOI’s policies have changed and what this means for the environment. “In totality, what they are doing to open up public lands to oil and gas development—to basically hand the keys over to the energy industry—is pretty astounding,” she said.

Cason shares the industry’s sense of having a rare opportunity to reshape the policy landscape. In Denver, he mused that the midterm elections weren’t too far off—and that the dynamic in the Senate, and possibly even the House, could change, making it more difficult to advance a deregulatory agenda. “You think about having four years to do things,” he said, “but for those of us who have been on the federal-government side of the fence, you don’t really have four years. And if you want to effect change, you have to have a sense of urgency from day one.”

Sent from my iPhone

**To:** [REDACTED] (b)(6) [REDACTED] aol.com]; J. Steven Griles [REDACTED] (b)(6)  
**From:** Cason, James  
**Sent:** 2017-11-17T15:04:09-05:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Fwd: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
**Received:** 2017-11-17T15:04:46-05:00

FYI. Sorry to be the cause of running your names through the mud once more. Neither of you deserve it.  
See article below.

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** **Swift, Heather** <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>  
**Date:** Fri, Nov 17, 2017 at 1:58 PM  
**Subject:** Fwd: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
**To:** James Cason <[james\\_cason@ios.doi.gov](mailto:james_cason@ios.doi.gov)>

-

Heather Swift  
Department of the Interior  
@DOIPressSec  
[Heather\\_Swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Heather_Swift@ios.doi.gov) | [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** **Heather swift** [REDACTED] (b)(6) >  
**Date:** Fri, Nov 17, 2017 at 1:57 PM  
**Subject:** The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
**To:** Heather Swift <[heather\\_swift@ios.doi.gov](mailto:heather_swift@ios.doi.gov)>

<https://www.thenation.com/article/the-plot-to-sell-americas-wilderness/>

## The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness

A little-known bureaucrat named James Cason is reshaping the Department of the Interior.

By [Adam Federman](#)

Yesterday 6:00 am

Illustration by Nurul Hana Anwar.

### **Feeling overwhelmed?**

Sign up for Take Action Now, our newsletter that connects busy people to the resistance.

One day in Mid-March, James Cason, the associate deputy secretary at the Department of the Interior, convened an impromptu meeting of the senior staff of the Bureau of Land Management. Cason, whose office is on the sixth floor, rarely wandered the halls, and some career civil servants still had never met him. A soft-spoken and unassuming man, Cason has cycled in and out of Republican administrations since the early 1980s and has largely avoided public attention. But people who have worked with him know him as a highly effective administrator and a disciple of some of the department's most notorious anti-environment leaders in previous years—a “hatchet man,” in the words of one former DOI employee who worked with him during the George W. Bush administration.

*This article was reported in partnership with the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute.*

About 30 employees were ushered into a conference room, where Cason announced that Kristin Bail, acting director of the BLM, would be replaced by Mike Nedd. The move itself wasn't all that surprising: Bail, who came from a conservation background, had been appointed in the final days of the Obama administration to serve in a temporary capacity; Nedd, who had been assistant director for energy, minerals, and realty management since 2007, was viewed as better positioned to implement the new administration's pro-industry agenda.

But the way Cason handled the meeting sent a stark message. According to two people who were present, he delivered what appeared to be hastily prepared remarks thanking Bail for her service but telling her that she was no longer needed in the position. One employee, who has since

left the DOI, said it was unclear whether Bail had been told beforehand of her demotion. “It was one of the most awkward, disrespectful things I’ve ever seen,” the former employee said. The spectacle amounted to a kind of public dismissal—and a warning shot. The meeting ended as abruptly as it had begun, with employees left staring at their seats. By the end of the day, Bail was carrying her things out of her office in a box and looking for another place to sit.

Bail’s transfer was the opening salvo in an unprecedented restructuring of the DOI. Three months later, in what some department staffers now call the “Thursday-night massacre,” Cason sent memos to more than two dozen of the DOI’s highest-ranking civil servants informing them of reassignments; they had 15 days to accept the new positions or retire. The Office of the Inspector General is currently investigating how the transfers were determined; some employees believe they were designed to push out long-serving staff as part of a department-wide purge, and that climate scientists in particular were targeted.

Cason, who once described himself as the department’s “regulatory czar,” has also overseen the dismantling of rules governing energy development on public lands. The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining—from Utah’s red-rock country to the frigid, perilous waters off Alaska’s coast—while stripping away basic environmental protections and reducing transparency. Across the Trump administration, the new mantra is “energy dominance”—a vision of the world in which the United States will amplify its influence with a dramatic expansion of oil, gas, and coal production, whatever the environmental costs.

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The axing of regulations and personnel is occurring with remarkable speed. In contrast to other federal departments mired by inept leadership in the Trump era, a small group of seasoned insiders has kept things humming along at the Department of the Interior, Cason chief among them. In the early months of the administration, according to one former

DOI employee, there seemed to be few decisions, no matter how small, that didn't cross his desk.

"From what I can tell, Jim Cason is running the show," the former employee said. "I think he's overseeing everything." In addition to orchestrating the personnel reassignments and chairing the regulatory-reform task force that has rewritten or eliminated many Obama-era policies, Cason has been tasked with reviewing every grant or cooperative agreement of \$100,000 or more, as well as any pending decisions with "nationwide, regional, or statewide impact." He wrote the *Federal Register* notice announcing the department's controversial review of 27 national monuments, and he has been granted virtual *carte blanche* to set policy as it relates to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Cason's return to the DOI doesn't surprise Jim Cubie, who was chief counsel to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) in 1989, when Leahy oversaw [an Agriculture Committee hearing](#) on Cason's nomination to a top environmental post in the George H.W. Bush administration. Cason's track record so alarmed the committee that he was eventually forced to withdraw his name from consideration. Now he's back in a position that doesn't require Senate approval. "He'll do a lot of damage," Cubie predicted.

Cason is one of only a handful of political appointees with deep knowledge of the Department of the Interior. (The DOI declined to make Cason available for an interview.) He faithfully carried out the agendas of two of the most controversial interior secretaries in recent memory—James Watt and Gale Norton. From 1985 to 1989, during the Reagan administration, Cason was deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management; in that capacity, he worked closely with Steven Griles, a former coal lobbyist and the chief architect of some of the most environmentally destructive policies of the Reagan years. Griles helped to engineer the regulatory changes that facilitated mountaintop-removal mining, and he interfered with a Fish and Wildlife Service report on the potential environmental damage caused by coastal drilling. As head of the DOI's Office of Surface Mining in the early 1980s, Griles also failed to collect tens of millions of dollars in civil penalties owed by companies that had broken environmental laws.

Throughout this period, Cason served as Griles's right-hand man, according to a former congressional staffer familiar with his record. "He learned well at Griles's knee about how to get stuff done," the staffer said. The two became close friends; Griles was best man at Cason's wedding in 1990. And in 2001, when Griles returned to the department under George W. Bush after more than a decade of lobbying for coal companies and other special interests, Cason joined him as his associate deputy. According to a former DOI employee who worked with Cason during the Bush administration, "Griles would have whatever idea, and Jim would figure out how to get it implemented. He's quite effective at doing that. He was known as Griles's hatchet man."

But unlike Griles, who was sentenced to 10 months in prison after lying to Congress about his ties to the disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, Cason has largely avoided the public eye. His personal style is exceedingly restrained, particularly in contrast with more flamboyant and controversial colleagues like Griles, who was known for being a brash talker with a volatile temper. Cason has a monotone way of speaking; he often dresses in a subdued blue suit and tie and seems to go out of his way to be agreeable. In an [appearance on C-SPAN](#) in 2005, as the Abramoff investigations were gaining momentum, a caller described Cason as a "Republican toady" and attacked the DOI for its policies toward Native Americans. Cason replied evenly, "OK, well, that's certainly a good point of view too."

Even when not behind the scenes at the DOI, Cason maintained a low profile. He's never worked as a registered lobbyist. During the Clinton administration, he lived in Western New York and was vice president of risk management at a company that manufactures ceramic-fiber products for industrial applications. More recently, he's done consulting work for Booz Allen Hamilton and Kelly Anderson & Associates (now KAA Federal Solutions), a business-management firm that works with federal and industrial clients. On his financial-disclosure form, submitted in July, Cason provided so few details about the contracting work he'd done with the Quapaw tribe in Oklahoma that, after queries by ProPublica, the DOI was forced to submit a revised version. In it, [Cason revealed](#) that over a five-month period in 2016, he'd earned \$50,000 doing "research" for the tribe. (The department's ethics lawyer called the omission an "oversight.")

KAA chief executive officer Tim Vigotsky, who hired Cason in 2012, describes him as a policy wonk who knows the DOI better than anyone. “There’s not a lot of flash,” Vigotsky said. “He works long hours—whatever it takes.” Because Cason wasn’t registered as a lobbyist at Booz Allen or Kelly Anderson, it’s unclear who his clients in the energy sector might have been. Vigotsky called Kelly Anderson’s list a “who’s who” of the industry but wouldn’t reveal the names of private clients. Much of the firm’s work involves providing assistance to companies seeking federal contracts. On his résumé, Cason stated that, in addition to providing consulting support for Native American, commercial, and federal clients, he helped to “network access to government officials.”

A window into what has otherwise been a veiled career opened in 1989, when Cason was nominated to serve as assistant secretary for natural resources and environment at the Department of Agriculture under George H.W. Bush. Few people had ever heard of Cason, who was only 35 when his confirmation hearings took place. The position is typically filled by noncontroversial policy experts, and the hearings are rarely the stuff of high-stakes political theater. But Cason’s nomination was unusually contentious, in large part because of his former boss—James Watt, one of the most polarizing and unpopular interior secretaries ever to hold the position.

As the DOI’s head under Ronald Reagan, Watt was known for his staunch support of property rights and for his attempts to sell millions of acres of public lands to drilling and mining interests; he resigned in 1983, after stating that a coal advisory commission he’d established was balanced because it included “a black...a woman, two Jews, and a cripple.” In his opening remarks at Cason’s hearing, Senator Leahy wasted little time in drawing a parallel between Cason and Watt. “Frankly, we do not need a James Watt clone in this position,” Leahy said. Jim Cubie, Leahy’s counsel, said they’d heard from a number of sources that “this guy’s going to be a disaster.... Anybody who was a Watt acolyte was trouble.”

In written testimony, Cason said he’d barely gotten to know Watt and “could not fairly or knowledgeably compare or contrast our philosophies.”

Yet Cason revealed that his philosophy was in fact closely aligned with Watt's when he faced a series of questions about his decision to approve the transfer of tens of thousands of acres of public land at below-market rates in 1986. The episode involved the sale of oil-shale claims to energy companies at \$2.50 an acre; weeks later, some of the same land was sold to private developers at 800 times the original price, reaping a windfall of \$37 million for the energy companies. Asked by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) whether the sale was "in the public interest," Cason replied: "I think it is in the public interest to assure that we properly address private-property rights." In that single sentence, Cason summed up Watt's worldview.

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But the hearing wasn't only a referendum on Watt—it demonstrated that Cason put his own stamp on a number of decisions that heavily favored industry. Cason's involvement in the alleged suppression of a BLM report on the dangers to the spotted owl dominated press accounts of the hearings. At the time, there was great concern among conservationists that the logging of old-growth forests in Oregon would lead to the owl's demise. Indeed, several studies carried out in the 1980s demonstrated that the forests were key to the species's survival. The BLM report commissioned by Cason found that the spotted owl would be imperiled if logging continued. Cason later claimed that the report didn't live up to the department's scientific standards—but several individuals involved in the review testified that Cason simply disagreed with their conclusions and had asked the DOI to bury the report. After news of the report leaked to the press, Cason had the DOI release what many felt was a watered-down version of the original. ("Jim Cason is a seasoned Department of the Interior official who brings decades of government, private sector, and personal experience to the position," a DOI spokesperson wrote in response to questions about his record, including the owl report. "We are lucky to have him.")

Cason had also pushed through a series of industry-friendly measures in the final weeks of the Reagan administration. He lowered the royalties paid for coal mined on public lands; authorized a rule that made it

possible for companies to mine in national parks or on Forest Service land (a rule considered so over the top that it was quickly withdrawn); traveled to Colorado to encourage—yet again—the transfer of thousands of acres of oil-shale claims at rock-bottom prices; and brokered an agreement with several major oil and gas companies that essentially undermined the federal government’s authority to audit royalty payments. Not only did Cason reach the latter deal without consulting state or tribal officials, whose constituents stood to lose out on millions in annual payments, but he also signed the agreement on letterhead from the industry’s attorneys. R. Max Peterson, then the executive vice president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, described Cason’s actions as “an inexcusable betrayal of the public trust.”

Even Republican members of the traditionally conservative Senate Agriculture Committee had their doubts. Summing up Cason’s years at the DOI, Indiana Senator Richard Lugar said: “The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.” Several weeks later, realizing that he didn’t have enough votes to secure the nomination, Cason withdrew his name.

**All** of that must have seemed like a distant memory this past summer, when Cason addressed a roomful of industry executives at the Colorado Oil and Gas Association’s annual energy summit in Denver. He spoke alongside Gale Norton, who had been the interior secretary for much of George W. Bush’s administration. Cason’s current post is the same one he held under Norton—but this time around, according to interviews with more than a half-dozen current and former DOI employees, he wields significantly more power. (Norton, who took a position with Royal Dutch Shell after leaving office in 2006, now runs her own consulting firm—Norton Regulatory Strategies—and works closely with the oil and gas industry.)

With a list of the summit’s major sponsors—BP, Anadarko, Noble Energy—projected on the wall behind him, Cason explained that Donald Trump’s win in November marked a profound shift in direction. Though few would describe the Department of the Interior, even under President Obama, as unfriendly to oil and gas producers, Cason declared that the

Trump administration had inherited “an anti-energy bias” and a “preservationist thought process” that needed rooting out.

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While the DOI has often struggled to balance its dual mandate of conservation and resource development, the scales have now tipped decisively in favor of the oil and gas industry. As a candidate, Trump promised to “unleash America’s \$50 trillion in untapped shale, oil, and natural-gas reserves, plus hundreds of years in clean-coal reserves”—a grandiose statement that has nonetheless become a kind of blueprint for his Department of the Interior. The long-held goal of “energy independence”—a stock phrase used by every administration at least since the Carter years—has been replaced by one of “energy dominance.” Trump officials believe that achieving it requires an aggressive push for increased access to public lands, including national monuments and offshore oil and gas reserves.

The DOI, as the largest landowner in the United States—managing roughly 500 million acres, one-fifth of the country’s landmass—is at the heart of this effort. The department also administers millions of acres in offshore oil and gas reserves. Trump has already reversed an Obama-era ban on drilling along part of the Atlantic coast and in the environmentally sensitive waters around Alaska. Now, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Republicans in Congress are seeking to fulfill one of the industry’s long-sought goals: opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the largest unexplored and undeveloped onshore basin in the United States. In December, the BLM will offer approximately 10.3 million acres of land in Alaska’s National Petroleum Reserve for oil and gas leasing. And next spring, the department will hold the largest oil- and gas-lease sale in the country’s history when it auctions off some 77 million acres of offshore reserves in the Gulf of Mexico.

Recently, the DOI announced that it would be running its operations more like a business, with the primary objective of generating revenue through energy production. According to a July report in *Bloomberg News*, Zinke is pushing to “retool the agency into a federal profit center.” The DOI’s climate-change webpage has undergone a makeover, too. Sometime

between February and April, the department replaced a lengthy informational page with two short paragraphs describing the DOI's preservation duties; the phrase "climate change" appears just once. And in April, the BLM—which is tasked with overseeing oil and gas leasing on federal land—changed the image on its home page from one of a couple of backpackers looking out onto a scenic landscape to a shot of a massive coal seam in Wyoming (an image that has since been removed).

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**To:** Mashburn, Lori[lori\_mashburn@ios.doi.gov]  
**From:** Cason, James  
**Sent:** 2017-11-17T16:51:58-05:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Fwd: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
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**Subject:** Fwd: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
**To:** James Cason <[james\\_cason@ios.doi.gov](mailto:james_cason@ios.doi.gov)>

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**Date:** Fri, Nov 17, 2017 at 1:57 PM  
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<https://www.thenation.com/article/the-plot-to-sell-americas-wilderness/>

## The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness

A little-known bureaucrat named James Cason  
is reshaping the Department of the Interior.

By [Adam Federman](#)  
Yesterday 6:00 am

Illustration by Nurul Hana Anwar.

## Feeling overwhelmed?

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One day in Mid-March, James Cason, the associate deputy secretary at the Department of the Interior, convened an impromptu meeting of the senior staff of the Bureau of Land Management. Cason, whose office is on the sixth floor, rarely wandered the halls, and some career civil servants still had never met him. A soft-spoken and unassuming man, Cason has cycled in and out of Republican administrations since the early 1980s and has largely avoided public attention. But people who have worked with him know him as a highly effective administrator and a disciple of some of the department's most notorious anti-environment leaders in previous years—a “hatchet man,” in the words of one former DOI employee who worked with him during the George W. Bush administration.

*This article was reported in partnership with the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute.*

About 30 employees were ushered into a conference room, where Cason announced that Kristin Bail, acting director of the BLM, would be replaced by Mike Nedd. The move itself wasn't all that surprising: Bail, who came from a conservation background, had been appointed in the final days of the Obama administration to serve in a temporary capacity; Nedd, who had been assistant director for energy, minerals, and realty management since 2007, was viewed as better positioned to implement the new administration's pro-industry agenda.

But the way Cason handled the meeting sent a stark message. According to two people who were present, he delivered what appeared to be hastily prepared remarks thanking Bail for her service but telling her that she was no longer needed in the position. One employee, who has since left the DOI, said it was unclear whether Bail had been told beforehand of her demotion. “It was one of the most awkward, disrespectful things I've ever seen,” the former employee said. The spectacle amounted to a kind of public dismissal—and a warning shot. The meeting ended as abruptly as it had begun, with employees left staring at their seats. By the end of

the day, Bail was carrying her things out of her office in a box and looking for another place to sit.

Bail's transfer was the opening salvo in an unprecedented restructuring of the DOI. Three months later, in what some department staffers now call the "Thursday-night massacre," Cason sent memos to more than two dozen of the DOI's highest-ranking civil servants informing them of reassignments; they had 15 days to accept the new positions or retire. The Office of the Inspector General is currently investigating how the transfers were determined; some employees believe they were designed to push out long-serving staff as part of a department-wide purge, and that climate scientists in particular were targeted.

Cason, who once described himself as the department's "regulatory czar," has also overseen the dismantling of rules governing energy development on public lands. The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining—from Utah's red-rock country to the frigid, perilous waters off Alaska's coast—while stripping away basic environmental protections and reducing transparency. Across the Trump administration, the new mantra is "energy dominance"—a vision of the world in which the United States will amplify its influence with a dramatic expansion of oil, gas, and coal production, whatever the environmental costs.

**The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining, from Utah's red-rock country to Alaska's frigid coastal waters.**

The axing of regulations and personnel is occurring with remarkable speed. In contrast to other federal departments mired by inept leadership in the Trump era, a small group of seasoned insiders has kept things humming along at the Department of the Interior, Cason chief among them. In the early months of the administration, according to one former DOI employee, there seemed to be few decisions, no matter how small, that didn't cross his desk.

"From what I can tell, Jim Cason is running the show," the former employee said. "I think he's overseeing everything." In addition to orchestrating the personnel reassignments and chairing the regulatory-

reform task force that has rewritten or eliminated many Obama-era policies, Cason has been tasked with reviewing every grant or cooperative agreement of \$100,000 or more, as well as any pending decisions with “nationwide, regional, or statewide impact.” He wrote the *Federal Register* notice announcing the department’s controversial review of 27 national monuments, and he has been granted virtual *carte blanche* to set policy as it relates to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Cason’s return to the DOI doesn’t surprise Jim Cubie, who was chief counsel to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) in 1989, when Leahy oversaw [an Agriculture Committee hearing](#) on Cason’s nomination to a top environmental post in the George H.W. Bush administration. Cason’s track record so alarmed the committee that he was eventually forced to withdraw his name from consideration. Now he’s back in a position that doesn’t require Senate approval. “He’ll do a lot of damage,” Cubie predicted.

Cason is one of only a handful of political appointees with deep knowledge of the Department of the Interior. (The DOI declined to make Cason available for an interview.) He faithfully carried out the agendas of two of the most controversial interior secretaries in recent memory—James Watt and Gale Norton. From 1985 to 1989, during the Reagan administration, Cason was deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management; in that capacity, he worked closely with Steven Griles, a former coal lobbyist and the chief architect of some of the most environmentally destructive policies of the Reagan years. Griles helped to engineer the regulatory changes that facilitated mountaintop-removal mining, and he interfered with a Fish and Wildlife Service report on the potential environmental damage caused by coastal drilling. As head of the DOI’s Office of Surface Mining in the early 1980s, Griles also failed to collect tens of millions of dollars in civil penalties owed by companies that had broken environmental laws.

Throughout this period, Cason served as Griles’s right-hand man, according to a former congressional staffer familiar with his record. “He learned well at Griles’s knee about how to get stuff done,” the staffer said. The two became close friends; Griles was best man at Cason’s wedding in 1990. And in 2001, when Griles returned to the department

under George W. Bush after more than a decade of lobbying for coal companies and other special interests, Cason joined him as his associate deputy. According to a former DOI employee who worked with Cason during the Bush administration, “Griles would have whatever idea, and Jim would figure out how to get it implemented. He’s quite effective at doing that. He was known as Griles’s hatchet man.”

But unlike Griles, who was sentenced to 10 months in prison after lying to Congress about his ties to the disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, Cason has largely avoided the public eye. His personal style is exceedingly restrained, particularly in contrast with more flamboyant and controversial colleagues like Griles, who was known for being a brash talker with a volatile temper. Cason has a monotone way of speaking; he often dresses in a subdued blue suit and tie and seems to go out of his way to be agreeable. In an [appearance on C-SPAN](#) in 2005, as the Abramoff investigations were gaining momentum, a caller described Cason as a “Republican toady” and attacked the DOI for its policies toward Native Americans. Cason replied evenly, “OK, well, that’s certainly a good point of view too.”

Even when not behind the scenes at the DOI, Cason maintained a low profile. He’s never worked as a registered lobbyist. During the Clinton administration, he lived in Western New York and was vice president of risk management at a company that manufactures ceramic-fiber products for industrial applications. More recently, he’s done consulting work for Booz Allen Hamilton and Kelly Anderson & Associates (now KAA Federal Solutions), a business-management firm that works with federal and industrial clients. On his financial-disclosure form, submitted in July, Cason provided so few details about the contracting work he’d done with the Quapaw tribe in Oklahoma that, after queries by ProPublica, the DOI was forced to submit a revised version. In it, [Cason revealed](#) that over a five-month period in 2016, he’d earned \$50,000 doing “research” for the tribe. (The department’s ethics lawyer called the omission an “oversight.”)

KAA chief executive officer Tim Vigotsky, who hired Cason in 2012, describes him as a policy wonk who knows the DOI better than anyone. “There’s not a lot of flash,” Vigotsky said. “He works long hours—whatever it takes.” Because Cason wasn’t registered as a

lobbyist at Booz Allen or Kelly Anderson, it's unclear who his clients in the energy sector might have been. Vigotsky called Kelly Anderson's list a "who's who" of the industry but wouldn't reveal the names of private clients. Much of the firm's work involves providing assistance to companies seeking federal contracts. On his résumé, Cason stated that, in addition to providing consulting support for Native American, commercial, and federal clients, he helped to "network access to government officials."

**A** window into what has otherwise been a veiled career opened in 1989, when Cason was nominated to serve as assistant secretary for natural resources and environment at the Department of Agriculture under George H.W. Bush. Few people had ever heard of Cason, who was only 35 when his confirmation hearings took place. The position is typically filled by noncontroversial policy experts, and the hearings are rarely the stuff of high-stakes political theater. But Cason's nomination was unusually contentious, in large part because of his former boss—James Watt, one of the most polarizing and unpopular interior secretaries ever to hold the position.

As the DOI's head under Ronald Reagan, Watt was known for his staunch support of property rights and for his attempts to sell millions of acres of public lands to drilling and mining interests; he resigned in 1983, after stating that a coal advisory commission he'd established was balanced because it included "a black...a woman, two Jews, and a cripple." In his opening remarks at Cason's hearing, Senator Leahy wasted little time in drawing a parallel between Cason and Watt. "Frankly, we do not need a James Watt clone in this position," Leahy said. Jim Cubie, Leahy's counsel, said they'd heard from a number of sources that "this guy's going to be a disaster.... Anybody who was a Watt acolyte was trouble."

In written testimony, Cason said he'd barely gotten to know Watt and "could not fairly or knowledgeably compare or contrast our philosophies." Yet Cason revealed that his philosophy was in fact closely aligned with Watt's when he faced a series of questions about his decision to approve the transfer of tens of thousands of acres of public land at below-market rates in 1986. The episode involved the sale of oil-shale claims to energy

companies at \$2.50 an acre; weeks later, some of the same land was sold to private developers at 800 times the original price, reaping a windfall of \$37 million for the energy companies. Asked by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) whether the sale was “in the public interest,” Cason replied: “I think it is in the public interest to assure that we properly address private-property rights.” In that single sentence, Cason summed up Watt’s worldview.

**“The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.”**

But the hearing wasn’t only a referendum on Watt—it demonstrated that Cason put his own stamp on a number of decisions that heavily favored industry. Cason’s involvement in the alleged suppression of a BLM report on the dangers to the spotted owl dominated press accounts of the hearings. At the time, there was great concern among conservationists that the logging of old-growth forests in Oregon would lead to the owl’s demise. Indeed, several studies carried out in the 1980s demonstrated that the forests were key to the species’s survival. The BLM report commissioned by Cason found that the spotted owl would be imperiled if logging continued. Cason later claimed that the report didn’t live up to the department’s scientific standards—but several individuals involved in the review testified that Cason simply disagreed with their conclusions and had asked the DOI to bury the report. After news of the report leaked to the press, Cason had the DOI release what many felt was a watered-down version of the original. (“Jim Cason is a seasoned Department of the Interior official who brings decades of government, private sector, and personal experience to the position,” a DOI spokesperson wrote in response to questions about his record, including the owl report. “We are lucky to have him.”)

Cason had also pushed through a series of industry-friendly measures in the final weeks of the Reagan administration. He lowered the royalties paid for coal mined on public lands; authorized a rule that made it possible for companies to mine in national parks or on Forest Service land (a rule considered so over the top that it was quickly withdrawn); traveled to Colorado to encourage—yet again—the transfer of thousands of acres of oil-shale claims at rock-bottom prices; and brokered an

agreement with several major oil and gas companies that essentially undermined the federal government's authority to audit royalty payments. Not only did Cason reach the latter deal without consulting state or tribal officials, whose constituents stood to lose out on millions in annual payments, but he also signed the agreement on letterhead from the industry's attorneys. R. Max Peterson, then the executive vice president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, described Cason's actions as "an inexcusable betrayal of the public trust."

Even Republican members of the traditionally conservative Senate Agriculture Committee had their doubts. Summing up Cason's years at the DOI, Indiana Senator Richard Lugar said: "The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view." Several weeks later, realizing that he didn't have enough votes to secure the nomination, Cason withdrew his name.

**All** of that must have seemed like a distant memory this past summer, when Cason addressed a roomful of industry executives at the Colorado Oil and Gas Association's annual energy summit in Denver. He spoke alongside Gale Norton, who had been the interior secretary for much of George W. Bush's administration. Cason's current post is the same one he held under Norton—but this time around, according to interviews with more than a half-dozen current and former DOI employees, he wields significantly more power. (Norton, who took a position with Royal Dutch Shell after leaving office in 2006, now runs her own consulting firm—Norton Regulatory Strategies—and works closely with the oil and gas industry.)

With a list of the summit's major sponsors—BP, Anadarko, Noble Energy—projected on the wall behind him, Cason explained that Donald Trump's win in November marked a profound shift in direction. Though few would describe the Department of the Interior, even under President Obama, as unfriendly to oil and gas producers, Cason declared that the Trump administration had inherited "an anti-energy bias" and a "preservationist thought process" that needed rooting out.

**"There's not a lot of flash. He works long hours—whatever it takes."**

While the DOI has often struggled to balance its dual mandate of conservation and resource development, the scales have now tipped decisively in favor of the oil and gas industry. As a candidate, Trump promised to “unleash America’s \$50 trillion in untapped shale, oil, and natural-gas reserves, plus hundreds of years in clean-coal reserves”—a grandiose statement that has nonetheless become a kind of blueprint for his Department of the Interior. The long-held goal of “energy independence”—a stock phrase used by every administration at least since the Carter years—has been replaced by one of “energy dominance.” Trump officials believe that achieving it requires an aggressive push for increased access to public lands, including national monuments and offshore oil and gas reserves.

The DOI, as the largest landowner in the United States—managing roughly 500 million acres, one-fifth of the country’s landmass—is at the heart of this effort. The department also administers millions of acres in offshore oil and gas reserves. Trump has already reversed an Obama-era ban on drilling along part of the Atlantic coast and in the environmentally sensitive waters around Alaska. Now, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Republicans in Congress are seeking to fulfill one of the industry’s long-sought goals: opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the largest unexplored and undeveloped onshore basin in the United States. In December, the BLM will offer approximately 10.3 million acres of land in Alaska’s National Petroleum Reserve for oil and gas leasing. And next spring, the department will hold the largest oil- and gas-lease sale in the country’s history when it auctions off some 77 million acres of offshore reserves in the Gulf of Mexico.

Recently, the DOI announced that it would be running its operations more like a business, with the primary objective of generating revenue through energy production. According to a July report in *Bloomberg News*, Zinke is pushing to “retool the agency into a federal profit center.” The DOI’s climate-change webpage has undergone a makeover, too. Sometime between February and April, the department replaced a lengthy informational page with two short paragraphs describing the DOI’s preservation duties; the phrase “climate change” appears just once. And in April, the BLM—which is tasked with overseeing oil and gas leasing on federal land—changed the image on its home page from one of a couple

of backpackers looking out onto a scenic landscape to a shot of a massive coal seam in Wyoming (an image that has since been removed).

In Denver, Cason reiterated that the DOI was more interested in facilitating energy development than regulating it; he told the roomful of oil and gas executives that they represented “a very important industry for the Department of Interior and the administration.” About a month after the conference, the DOI submitted a draft of its strategic vision for the next five years to the Office of Management and Budget. According to a copy of the plan obtained by *The Nation*, the department’s priorities include accelerating the exploitation of “vast amounts” of untapped energy reserves on public lands. The outline makes no mention of climate change—a phrase that appeared dozens of times in the previous strategic plan.

In October, the DOI released a report detailing the burdens on energy development and recommending sweeping changes that would undermine its own basic regulatory authority. The high-profile targets included a 2015 rule requiring rudimentary safeguards for fracking on public lands, as well as a conservation plan for the imperiled sage grouse. The report also raised the possibility of eliminating the federally required land-management plans that might limit drilling in certain areas; the conditions placed on development that affects endangered species or critical habitat; and even the collection of basic data related to energy production, which critics see as an attempt to muddy an already opaque process. Jeremy Nichols of the advocacy group Wild Earth Guardians called the proposed elimination of these common-sense measures “shocking even for this administration.”

The Department of the Interior is made up of nine bureaus, including the BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service, with 70,000 employees and state and regional offices across the country. Secretary Zinke, a former Navy SEAL and one-term US congressman, has no experience managing such a large, decentralized bureaucracy, and he has relied heavily on his political appointees to run the department’s day-to-day operations. With Cason at the helm, a small circle of insiders orchestrated the aggressive deregulatory agenda and the unprecedented reshuffling of career staff.

“Cason is really an administrator,” a DOI employee who has known him since the George W. Bush administration told me. “He understands how to run an organization.” The position Cason now holds—associate deputy secretary—was created especially for him when he joined the Bush administration, most likely because of fears that he would not make it through another round of confirmation hearings. “They didn’t even try for a nomination, because they knew it would be dead on arrival,” said another former DOI employee who worked closely with Cason at the time.

In his remarks in Denver, Cason said it was evident from day one that career employees needed “an attitude adjustment.” New leadership, he continued, would force them to “adopt a different way of looking at things.” (In a recent speech before the National Petroleum Council, Interior Secretary Zinke described “30 percent” of DOI employees as “not loyal to the flag.”) As a member of the Executive Resources Board, which is responsible for senior-executive-level reassignments, Cason has overseen a series of personnel changes that appear designed to enhance the administration’s pro-oil-and-gas orientation. Under Zinke, the ERB is made up entirely of political appointees, despite strong recommendations from the Office of Personnel Management that the board include a mix of political and career employees “to provide...a balanced perspective.” According to Elizabeth Klein, who occupied Cason’s role in the Obama administration and served on the ERB for part of that time, there was a rough split between civil servants and political appointees.

The “Thursday-night massacre” occurred on June 15, when more than two dozen of the department’s Senior Executive Service (SES) employees, from nearly every agency, received memos informing them of the reassignments. None of the employees that *The Nation* spoke with were consulted in advance, which is considered both a common courtesy and responsible management. In most cases, even agency directors were kept in the dark until just before the memos went out. When one high-level supervisor asked if they were on the list, Cason reportedly replied, “Not this round.” The reassignments sent shock waves throughout the DOI. Dan Ashe, former director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said the transfers were clearly designed to disrupt the normal

order of things and to undermine the authority of senior civil servants. Cason, who had served as chief human-capital officer under Bush, was intimately familiar with the SES and personally knew many of the employees who were transferred.

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Among those reassigned was Joel Clement, a senior policy adviser and widely respected climate scientist, who was moved to an accounting office overseeing royalty collection from the fossil-fuel industry. Clement later [filed a whistle-blower complaint](#) alleging that his reassignment was politically motivated; he has since resigned. In his departing letter, Clement blasted senior-level appointees for being “shackled to special interests such as oil, gas, and mining.” Virginia Burkett, who oversaw climate-science research at the US Geological Survey, was transferred to an undefined advisory role in the office of the assistant secretary for water and science; she ended up leaving the SES and returning to a lower-grade position. Cindy Dohner, the Fish and Wildlife Service’s highly respected Southeast regional director, who oversaw restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP disaster, was reassigned to serve as the agency’s director for international affairs. She resigned instead.

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presence of experienced appointees like Cason and David Bernhardt, Zinke's deputy secretary, who was confirmed in late July. A former corporate lobbyist whose clients included major oil and gas producers, Bernhardt was once described by Center for Western Priorities spokesman Aaron Weiss as a "walking conflict of interest." (Cason served as acting deputy secretary until Bernhardt's nomination.)

A handful of other DOI officials from the George W. Bush era have resurfaced after spending the past eight years working for far-right think tanks or as industry lobbyists. Doug Domenech, most recently director of the Fueling Freedom Project, which promotes "the forgotten moral case for fossil fuels," is now assistant secretary for insular affairs, coordinating policy for American territories in the South Pacific. Daniel Jorjani, a longtime adviser for several of the Koch brothers' groups, is helping to craft the department's legal policy. Scott Cameron, who spent the past several years advising a lobbying firm whose clients include Shell Oil and the Marcellus Shale Coalition, is now overseeing the DOI's budget.

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**From:** Mashburn, Lori  
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**Importance:** Normal  
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**Received:** 2017-11-17T17:15:46-05:00

Lori K. Mashburn  
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202.208.1694

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**Date:** Fri, Nov 17, 2017 at 4:51 PM  
**Subject:** Fwd: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
**To:** "Mashburn, Lori" <lori\_mashburn@ios.doi.gov>

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**From:** Swift, Heather <heather\_swift@ios.doi.gov>  
**Date:** Fri, Nov 17, 2017 at 1:58 PM  
**Subject:** Fwd: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
**To:** James Cason <james\_cason@ios.doi.gov>

-

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Department of the Interior  
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**From:** Heather swift <[REDACTED] (b)(6)>  
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<https://www.thenation.com/article/the-plot-to-sell-americas-wilderness/>

## The Plot to Loot America's

# Wilderness

A little-known bureaucrat named James Cason is reshaping the Department of the Interior.

By [Adam Federman](#)

Yesterday 6:00 am

Illustration by Nurul Hana Anwar.

## Feeling overwhelmed?

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One day in Mid-March, James Cason, the associate deputy secretary at the Department of the Interior, convened an impromptu meeting of the senior staff of the Bureau of Land Management. Cason, whose office is on the sixth floor, rarely wandered the halls, and some career civil servants still had never met him. A soft-spoken and unassuming man, Cason has cycled in and out of Republican administrations since the early 1980s and has largely avoided public attention. But people who have worked with him know him as a highly effective administrator and a disciple of some of the department's most notorious anti-environment leaders in previous years—a “hatchet man,” in the words of one former DOI employee who worked with him during the George W. Bush administration.

*This article was reported in partnership with the Investigative Fund at the Nation Institute.*

About 30 employees were ushered into a conference room, where Cason announced that Kristin Bail, acting director of the BLM, would be replaced by Mike Nedd. The move itself wasn't all that surprising: Bail, who came from a conservation background, had been appointed in the final days of the Obama administration to serve in a temporary capacity; Nedd, who had been assistant director for energy, minerals, and realty management

since 2007, was viewed as better positioned to implement the new administration's pro-industry agenda.

But the way Cason handled the meeting sent a stark message. According to two people who were present, he delivered what appeared to be hastily prepared remarks thanking Bail for her service but telling her that she was no longer needed in the position. One employee, who has since left the DOI, said it was unclear whether Bail had been told beforehand of her demotion. "It was one of the most awkward, disrespectful things I've ever seen," the former employee said. The spectacle amounted to a kind of public dismissal—and a warning shot. The meeting ended as abruptly as it had begun, with employees left staring at their seats. By the end of the day, Bail was carrying her things out of her office in a box and looking for another place to sit.

Bail's transfer was the opening salvo in an unprecedented restructuring of the DOI. Three months later, in what some department staffers now call the "Thursday-night massacre," Cason sent memos to more than two dozen of the DOI's highest-ranking civil servants informing them of reassignments; they had 15 days to accept the new positions or retire. The Office of the Inspector General is currently investigating how the transfers were determined; some employees believe they were designed to push out long-serving staff as part of a department-wide purge, and that climate scientists in particular were targeted.

Cason, who once described himself as the department's "regulatory czar," has also overseen the dismantling of rules governing energy development on public lands. The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining—from Utah's red-rock country to the frigid, perilous waters off Alaska's coast—while stripping away basic environmental protections and reducing transparency. Across the Trump administration, the new mantra is "energy dominance"—a vision of the world in which the United States will amplify its influence with a dramatic expansion of oil, gas, and coal production, whatever the environmental costs.

**The DOI is poised to open up millions of acres to drilling and mining, from Utah's red-rock country to Alaska's frigid coastal**

**waters.**

The axing of regulations and personnel is occurring with remarkable speed. In contrast to other federal departments mired by inept leadership in the Trump era, a small group of seasoned insiders has kept things humming along at the Department of the Interior, Cason chief among them. In the early months of the administration, according to one former DOI employee, there seemed to be few decisions, no matter how small, that didn't cross his desk.

"From what I can tell, Jim Cason is running the show," the former employee said. "I think he's overseeing everything." In addition to orchestrating the personnel reassignments and chairing the regulatory-reform task force that has rewritten or eliminated many Obama-era policies, Cason has been tasked with reviewing every grant or cooperative agreement of \$100,000 or more, as well as any pending decisions with "nationwide, regional, or statewide impact." He wrote the *Federal Register* notice announcing the department's controversial review of 27 national monuments, and he has been granted virtual *carte blanche* to set policy as it relates to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Cason's return to the DOI doesn't surprise Jim Cubie, who was chief counsel to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) in 1989, when Leahy oversaw [an Agriculture Committee hearing](#) on Cason's nomination to a top environmental post in the George H.W. Bush administration. Cason's track record so alarmed the committee that he was eventually forced to withdraw his name from consideration. Now he's back in a position that doesn't require Senate approval. "He'll do a lot of damage," Cubie predicted.

Cason is one of only a handful of political appointees with deep knowledge of the Department of the Interior. (The DOI declined to make Cason available for an interview.) He faithfully carried out the agendas of two of the most controversial interior secretaries in recent memory—James Watt and Gale Norton. From 1985 to 1989, during the Reagan administration, Cason was deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management; in that capacity, he worked closely with Steven Griles, a former coal lobbyist and the chief architect of some of

the most environmentally destructive policies of the Reagan years. Griles helped to engineer the regulatory changes that facilitated mountaintop-removal mining, and he interfered with a Fish and Wildlife Service report on the potential environmental damage caused by coastal drilling. As head of the DOI's Office of Surface Mining in the early 1980s, Griles also failed to collect tens of millions of dollars in civil penalties owed by companies that had broken environmental laws.

Throughout this period, Cason served as Griles's right-hand man, according to a former congressional staffer familiar with his record. "He learned well at Griles's knee about how to get stuff done," the staffer said. The two became close friends; Griles was best man at Cason's wedding in 1990. And in 2001, when Griles returned to the department under George W. Bush after more than a decade of lobbying for coal companies and other special interests, Cason joined him as his associate deputy. According to a former DOI employee who worked with Cason during the Bush administration, "Griles would have whatever idea, and Jim would figure out how to get it implemented. He's quite effective at doing that. He was known as Griles's hatchet man."

But unlike Griles, who was sentenced to 10 months in prison after lying to Congress about his ties to the disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, Cason has largely avoided the public eye. His personal style is exceedingly restrained, particularly in contrast with more flamboyant and controversial colleagues like Griles, who was known for being a brash talker with a volatile temper. Cason has a monotone way of speaking; he often dresses in a subdued blue suit and tie and seems to go out of his way to be agreeable. In an [appearance on C-SPAN](#) in 2005, as the Abramoff investigations were gaining momentum, a caller described Cason as a "Republican toady" and attacked the DOI for its policies toward Native Americans. Cason replied evenly, "OK, well, that's certainly a good point of view too."

Even when not behind the scenes at the DOI, Cason maintained a low profile. He's never worked as a registered lobbyist. During the Clinton administration, he lived in Western New York and was vice president of risk management at a company that manufactures ceramic-fiber products for industrial applications. More recently, he's done consulting work for

Booz Allen Hamilton and Kelly Anderson & Associates (now KAA Federal Solutions), a business-management firm that works with federal and industrial clients. On his financial-disclosure form, submitted in July, Cason provided so few details about the contracting work he'd done with the Quapaw tribe in Oklahoma that, after queries by ProPublica, the DOI was forced to submit a revised version. In it, Cason revealed that over a five-month period in 2016, he'd earned \$50,000 doing "research" for the tribe. (The department's ethics lawyer called the omission an "oversight.")

KAA chief executive officer Tim Vigotsky, who hired Cason in 2012, describes him as a policy wonk who knows the DOI better than anyone. "There's not a lot of flash," Vigotsky said. "He works long hours—whatever it takes." Because Cason wasn't registered as a lobbyist at Booz Allen or Kelly Anderson, it's unclear who his clients in the energy sector might have been. Vigotsky called Kelly Anderson's list a "who's who" of the industry but wouldn't reveal the names of private clients. Much of the firm's work involves providing assistance to companies seeking federal contracts. On his résumé, Cason stated that, in addition to providing consulting support for Native American, commercial, and federal clients, he helped to "network access to government officials."

**A** window into what has otherwise been a veiled career opened in 1989, when Cason was nominated to serve as assistant secretary for natural resources and environment at the Department of Agriculture under George H.W. Bush. Few people had ever heard of Cason, who was only 35 when his confirmation hearings took place. The position is typically filled by noncontroversial policy experts, and the hearings are rarely the stuff of high-stakes political theater. But Cason's nomination was unusually contentious, in large part because of his former boss—James Watt, one of the most polarizing and unpopular interior secretaries ever to hold the position.

As the DOI's head under Ronald Reagan, Watt was known for his staunch support of property rights and for his attempts to sell millions of acres of public lands to drilling and mining interests; he resigned in 1983, after stating that a coal advisory commission he'd established was balanced because it included "a black...a woman, two Jews, and a

cripple.” In his opening remarks at Cason’s hearing, Senator Leahy wasted little time in drawing a parallel between Cason and Watt. “Frankly, we do not need a James Watt clone in this position,” Leahy said. Jim Cubie, Leahy’s counsel, said they’d heard from a number of sources that “this guy’s going to be a disaster.... Anybody who was a Watt acolyte was trouble.”

In written testimony, Cason said he’d barely gotten to know Watt and “could not fairly or knowledgeably compare or contrast our philosophies.” Yet Cason revealed that his philosophy was in fact closely aligned with Watt’s when he faced a series of questions about his decision to approve the transfer of tens of thousands of acres of public land at below-market rates in 1986. The episode involved the sale of oil-shale claims to energy companies at \$2.50 an acre; weeks later, some of the same land was sold to private developers at 800 times the original price, reaping a windfall of \$37 million for the energy companies. Asked by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) whether the sale was “in the public interest,” Cason replied: “I think it is in the public interest to assure that we properly address private-property rights.” In that single sentence, Cason summed up Watt’s worldview.

**“The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.”**

But the hearing wasn’t only a referendum on Watt—it demonstrated that Cason put his own stamp on a number of decisions that heavily favored industry. Cason’s involvement in the alleged suppression of a BLM report on the dangers to the spotted owl dominated press accounts of the hearings. At the time, there was great concern among conservationists that the logging of old-growth forests in Oregon would lead to the owl’s demise. Indeed, several studies carried out in the 1980s demonstrated that the forests were key to the species’s survival. The BLM report commissioned by Cason found that the spotted owl would be imperiled if logging continued. Cason later claimed that the report didn’t live up to the department’s scientific standards—but several individuals involved in the review testified that Cason simply disagreed with their conclusions and had asked the DOI to bury the report. After news of the report leaked to the press, Cason had the DOI release what many felt was a watered-

down version of the original. (“Jim Cason is a seasoned Department of the Interior official who brings decades of government, private sector, and personal experience to the position,” a DOI spokesperson wrote in response to questions about his record, including the owl report. “We are lucky to have him.”)

Cason had also pushed through a series of industry-friendly measures in the final weeks of the Reagan administration. He lowered the royalties paid for coal mined on public lands; authorized a rule that made it possible for companies to mine in national parks or on Forest Service land (a rule considered so over the top that it was quickly withdrawn); traveled to Colorado to encourage—yet again—the transfer of thousands of acres of oil-shale claims at rock-bottom prices; and brokered an agreement with several major oil and gas companies that essentially undermined the federal government’s authority to audit royalty payments. Not only did Cason reach the latter deal without consulting state or tribal officials, whose constituents stood to lose out on millions in annual payments, but he also signed the agreement on letterhead from the industry’s attorneys. R. Max Peterson, then the executive vice president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, described Cason’s actions as “an inexcusable betrayal of the public trust.”

Even Republican members of the traditionally conservative Senate Agriculture Committee had their doubts. Summing up Cason’s years at the DOI, Indiana Senator Richard Lugar said: “The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.” Several weeks later, realizing that he didn’t have enough votes to secure the nomination, Cason withdrew his name.

**All** of that must have seemed like a distant memory this past summer, when Cason addressed a roomful of industry executives at the Colorado Oil and Gas Association’s annual energy summit in Denver. He spoke alongside Gale Norton, who had been the interior secretary for much of George W. Bush’s administration. Cason’s current post is the same one he held under Norton—but this time around, according to interviews with more than a half-dozen current and former DOI employees, he wields significantly more power. (Norton, who took a position with Royal Dutch

Shell after leaving office in 2006, now runs her own consulting firm—Norton Regulatory Strategies—and works closely with the oil and gas industry.)

With a list of the summit's major sponsors—BP, Anadarko, Noble Energy—projected on the wall behind him, Cason explained that Donald Trump's win in November marked a profound shift in direction. Though few would describe the Department of the Interior, even under President Obama, as unfriendly to oil and gas producers, Cason declared that the Trump administration had inherited “an anti-energy bias” and a “preservationist thought process” that needed rooting out.

**“There’s not a lot of flash. He works long hours—whatever it takes.”**

While the DOI has often struggled to balance its dual mandate of conservation and resource development, the scales have now tipped decisively in favor of the oil and gas industry. As a candidate, Trump promised to “unleash America’s \$50 trillion in untapped shale, oil, and natural-gas reserves, plus hundreds of years in clean-coal reserves”—a grandiose statement that has nonetheless become a kind of blueprint for his Department of the Interior. The long-held goal of “energy independence”—a stock phrase used by every administration at least since the Carter years—has been replaced by one of “energy dominance.” Trump officials believe that achieving it requires an aggressive push for increased access to public lands, including national monuments and offshore oil and gas reserves.

The DOI, as the largest landowner in the United States—managing roughly 500 million acres, one-fifth of the country’s landmass—is at the heart of this effort. The department also administers millions of acres in offshore oil and gas reserves. Trump has already reversed an Obama-era ban on drilling along part of the Atlantic coast and in the environmentally sensitive waters around Alaska. Now, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Republicans in Congress are seeking to fulfill one of the industry’s long-sought goals: opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the largest unexplored and undeveloped onshore basin in the United States. In December, the BLM will offer approximately 10.3 million acres of land in Alaska’s National Petroleum Reserve for oil and gas

leasing. And next spring, the department will hold the largest oil- and gas-lease sale in the country's history when it auctions off some 77 million acres of offshore reserves in the Gulf of Mexico.

Recently, the DOI announced that it would be running its operations more like a business, with the primary objective of generating revenue through energy production. According to a July report in *Bloomberg News*, Zinke is pushing to "retool the agency into a federal profit center." The DOI's climate-change webpage has undergone a makeover, too. Sometime between February and April, the department replaced a lengthy informational page with two short paragraphs describing the DOI's preservation duties; the phrase "climate change" appears just once. And in April, the BLM—which is tasked with overseeing oil and gas leasing on federal land—changed the image on its home page from one of a couple of backpackers looking out onto a scenic landscape to a shot of a massive coal seam in Wyoming (an image that has since been removed).

In Denver, Cason reiterated that the DOI was more interested in facilitating energy development than regulating it; he told the roomful of oil and gas executives that they represented "a very important industry for the Department of Interior and the administration." About a month after the conference, the DOI submitted a draft of its strategic vision for the next five years to the Office of Management and Budget. According to a copy of the plan obtained by *The Nation*, the department's priorities include accelerating the exploitation of "vast amounts" of untapped energy reserves on public lands. The outline makes no mention of climate change—a phrase that appeared dozens of times in the previous strategic plan.

In October, the DOI released a report detailing the burdens on energy development and recommending sweeping changes that would undermine its own basic regulatory authority. The high-profile targets included a 2015 rule requiring rudimentary safeguards for fracking on public lands, as well as a conservation plan for the imperiled sage grouse. The report also raised the possibility of eliminating the federally required land-management plans that might limit drilling in certain areas; the conditions placed on development that affects endangered species or critical habitat; and even the collection of basic data related to energy

production, which critics see as an attempt to muddy an already opaque process. Jeremy Nichols of the advocacy group Wild Earth Guardians called the proposed elimination of these common-sense measures “shocking even for this administration.”

The Department of the Interior is made up of nine bureaus, including the BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service, with 70,000 employees and state and regional offices across the country. Secretary Zinke, a former Navy SEAL and one-term US congressman, has no experience managing such a large, decentralized bureaucracy, and he has relied heavily on his political appointees to run the department’s day-to-day operations. With Cason at the helm, a small circle of insiders orchestrated the aggressive deregulatory agenda and the unprecedented reshuffling of career staff.

“Cason is really an administrator,” a DOI employee who has known him since the George W. Bush administration told me. “He understands how to run an organization.” The position Cason now holds—associate deputy secretary—was created especially for him when he joined the Bush administration, most likely because of fears that he would not make it through another round of confirmation hearings. “They didn’t even try for a nomination, because they knew it would be dead on arrival,” said another former DOI employee who worked closely with Cason at the time.

In his remarks in Denver, Cason said it was evident from day one that career employees needed “an attitude adjustment.” New leadership, he continued, would force them to “adopt a different way of looking at things.” (In a recent speech before the National Petroleum Council, Interior Secretary Zinke described “30 percent” of DOI employees as “not loyal to the flag.”) As a member of the Executive Resources Board, which is responsible for senior-executive-level reassignments, Cason has overseen a series of personnel changes that appear designed to enhance the administration’s pro-oil-and-gas orientation. Under Zinke, the ERB is made up entirely of political appointees, despite strong recommendations from the Office of Personnel Management that the board include a mix of political and career employees “to provide...a balanced perspective.” According to Elizabeth Klein, who occupied Cason’s role in the Obama administration and served on the ERB for part

of that time, there was a rough split between civil servants and political appointees.

The “Thursday-night massacre” occurred on June 15, when more than two dozen of the department’s Senior Executive Service (SES) employees, from nearly every agency, received memos informing them of the reassignments. None of the employees that *The Nation* spoke with were consulted in advance, which is considered both a common courtesy and responsible management. In most cases, even agency directors were kept in the dark until just before the memos went out. When one high-level supervisor asked if they were on the list, Cason reportedly replied, “Not this round.” The reassignments sent shock waves throughout the DOI. Dan Ashe, former director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said the transfers were clearly designed to disrupt the normal order of things and to undermine the authority of senior civil servants. Cason, who had served as chief human-capital officer under Bush, was intimately familiar with the SES and personally knew many of the employees who were transferred.

**“What they are doing to hand the keys over to the energy industry is pretty astounding.”**

Among those reassigned was Joel Clement, a senior policy adviser and widely respected climate scientist, who was moved to an accounting office overseeing royalty collection from the fossil-fuel industry. Clement later [filed a whistle-blower complaint](#) alleging that his reassignment was politically motivated; he has since resigned. In his departing letter, Clement blasted senior-level appointees for being “shackled to special interests such as oil, gas, and mining.” Virginia Burkett, who oversaw climate-science research at the US Geological Survey, was transferred to an undefined advisory role in the office of the assistant secretary for water and science; she ended up leaving the SES and returning to a lower-grade position. Cindy Dohner, the Fish and Wildlife Service’s highly respected Southeast regional director, who oversaw restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP disaster, was reassigned to serve as the agency’s director for international affairs. She resigned instead.

“It made people very afraid to make decisions about things or to advocate

for what we would call ‘good government,’” said Debra Sonderman, who was moved after almost 20 years in her role as director of acquisition and property management. Sonderman, too, has resigned.

According to numerous reports, the DOI is planning another series of reassignments. Rumors have been circulating since June that they could be announced at any time. One former DOI employee said that the list has already been compiled, but the department is waiting for the inspector general’s investigation to conclude before pulling the trigger. “Everybody is looking over their shoulder,” said Ashe, the former Fish and Wildlife Service director.

Unlike other departments that have displayed a shocking level of dysfunction—a kind of embodiment of the Trump presidency itself—the DOI is operating with ruthless efficiency. This is largely due to the presence of experienced appointees like Cason and David Bernhardt, Zinke’s deputy secretary, who was confirmed in late July. A former corporate lobbyist whose clients included major oil and gas producers, Bernhardt was once described by Center for Western Priorities spokesman Aaron Weiss as a “walking conflict of interest.” (Cason served as acting deputy secretary until Bernhardt’s nomination.)

A handful of other DOI officials from the George W. Bush era have resurfaced after spending the past eight years working for far-right think tanks or as industry lobbyists. Doug Domenech, most recently director of the Fueling Freedom Project, which promotes “the forgotten moral case for fossil fuels,” is now assistant secretary for insular affairs, coordinating policy for American territories in the South Pacific. Daniel Jorjani, a longtime adviser for several of the Koch brothers’ groups, is helping to craft the department’s legal policy. Scott Cameron, who spent the past several years advising a lobbying firm whose clients include Shell Oil and the Marcellus Shale Coalition, is now overseeing the DOI’s budget.

The oil and gas industry is now taking full advantage of the access offered by its allies at the department. Cason has described the DOI as having an “open-door policy,” and in the first month and a half of the administration—before Zinke was even confirmed—met with top industry lawyers, corporate lobbyists, and industry trade groups, including the

American Petroleum Institute and Peabody Energy. Zinke himself has had dozens of meetings with energy executives and lobbyists, including those from ExxonMobil and BP. He's used taxpayer dollars to fly on a private jet owned by an oil-and-gas-exploration firm in Wyoming, and as a member of Congress he received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the industry. So far, eight of the 12 secretarial orders he's issued have called for greater access to drilling on public lands and in offshore waters.

In June, the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA) sent a midyear legislative agenda to its board of directors, announcing that the playing field for oil and gas producers has been "dramatically altered." A copy obtained by *The Nation* shows that in just the first few months of the Trump administration, the lobbying group achieved an astonishing number of the regulatory rollbacks on its wish list, including an elimination of the fracking rule and another that would have closed a loophole allowing coal companies to calculate their own royalties on coal sold at below-market rates.

There is still a great deal that energy interests hope to accomplish during the Trump administration. Ending a rule to limit methane venting and flaring from wells is at the top of that list. Undermining protections for endangered species on federal land is another key item. A third is ensuring that future administrations are unable to finalize what the IPAA calls "harmful" air-quality regulations that it says would limit offshore development.

Kate Kelly, former senior adviser to then–Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and current director of the public-lands team at the Center for American Progress, warns that it's difficult to appreciate just how radically the DOI's policies have changed and what this means for the environment. "In totality, what they are doing to open up public lands to oil and gas development—to basically hand the keys over to the energy industry—is pretty astounding," she said.

Cason shares the industry's sense of having a rare opportunity to reshape the policy landscape. In Denver, he mused that the midterm elections weren't too far off—and that the dynamic in the Senate, and

possibly even the House, could change, making it more difficult to advance a deregulatory agenda. "You think about having four years to do things," he said, "but for those of us who have been on the federal-government side of the fence, you don't really have four years. And if you want to effect change, you have to have a sense of urgency from day one."

Sent from my iPhone

**To:** Cason, James[james\_cason@ios.doi.gov]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED] (b)(6) aol.com]  
**From:** J. Steven Griles  
**Sent:** 2017-11-17T19:13:16-05:00  
**Importance:** Normal  
**Subject:** Re: Fwd: The Plot to Loot America's Wilderness | The Nation  
**Received:** 2017-11-17T19:13:27-05:00

Never let the bastards get you down. Keep up the good work and remember we love you!

On Nov 17, 2017 3:04 PM, "Cason, James" <james\_cason@ios.doi.gov> wrote:

FYI. Sorry to be the cause of running your names through the mud once more. Neither of you deserve it.  
See article below.

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By [Adam Federman](#)

Yesterday 6:00 am

Illustration by Nurul Hana Anwar.

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About 30 employees were ushered into a conference room, where Cason announced that Kristin Bail, acting director of the BLM, would be replaced by Mike Nedd. The move itself wasn't all that surprising: Bail, who came from a conservation background, had been appointed in the final days of the Obama administration to serve in a temporary capacity; Nedd, who had been assistant director for energy, minerals, and realty management since 2007, was viewed as better positioned to implement the new administration's pro-industry agenda.

But the way Cason handled the meeting sent a stark message. According to two people who were present, he delivered what appeared to be hastily prepared remarks thanking Bail for her service but telling her that she was no longer needed in the position. One employee, who has since left the DOI, said it was unclear whether Bail had been told beforehand of her demotion. “It was one of the most awkward, disrespectful things I’ve ever seen,” the former employee said. The spectacle amounted to a kind of public dismissal—and a warning shot. The meeting ended as abruptly as it had begun, with employees left staring at their seats. By the end of the day, Bail was carrying her things out of her office in a box and looking for another place to sit.

Bail’s transfer was the opening salvo in an unprecedented restructuring of the DOI. Three months later, in what some department staffers now call the “Thursday-night massacre,” Cason sent memos to more than two dozen of the DOI’s highest-ranking civil servants informing them of reassignments; they had 15 days to accept the new positions or retire. The Office of the Inspector General is currently investigating how the transfers were determined; some employees believe they were designed to push out long-serving staff as part of a department-wide purge, and that climate scientists in particular were targeted.

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speed. In contrast to other federal departments mired by inept leadership in the Trump era, a small group of seasoned insiders has kept things humming along at the Department of the Interior, Cason chief among them. In the early months of the administration, according to one former DOI employee, there seemed to be few decisions, no matter how small, that didn't cross his desk.

"From what I can tell, Jim Cason is running the show," the former employee said. "I think he's overseeing everything." In addition to orchestrating the personnel reassignments and chairing the regulatory-reform task force that has rewritten or eliminated many Obama-era policies, Cason has been tasked with reviewing every grant or cooperative agreement of \$100,000 or more, as well as any pending decisions with "nationwide, regional, or statewide impact." He wrote the *Federal Register* notice announcing the department's controversial review of 27 national monuments, and he has been granted virtual *carte blanche* to set policy as it relates to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Cason's return to the DOI doesn't surprise Jim Cubie, who was chief counsel to Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) in 1989, when Leahy oversaw [an Agriculture Committee hearing](#) on Cason's nomination to a top environmental post in the George H.W. Bush administration. Cason's track record so alarmed the committee that he was eventually forced to withdraw his name from consideration. Now he's back in a position that doesn't require Senate approval. "He'll do a lot of damage," Cubie predicted.

Cason is one of only a handful of political appointees with deep knowledge of the Department of the Interior. (The DOI declined to make Cason available for an interview.) He faithfully carried out the agendas of two of the most controversial interior secretaries in recent memory—James Watt and Gale Norton. From 1985 to 1989, during the Reagan administration, Cason was deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management; in that capacity, he worked closely with Steven Griles, a former coal lobbyist and the chief architect of some of the most environmentally destructive policies of the Reagan years. Griles helped to engineer the regulatory changes that facilitated mountaintop-removal mining, and he interfered with a Fish and Wildlife

Service report on the potential environmental damage caused by coastal drilling. As head of the DOI's Office of Surface Mining in the early 1980s, Griles also failed to collect tens of millions of dollars in civil penalties owed by companies that had broken environmental laws.

Throughout this period, Cason served as Griles's right-hand man, according to a former congressional staffer familiar with his record. "He learned well at Griles's knee about how to get stuff done," the staffer said. The two became close friends; Griles was best man at Cason's wedding in 1990. And in 2001, when Griles returned to the department under George W. Bush after more than a decade of lobbying for coal companies and other special interests, Cason joined him as his associate deputy. According to a former DOI employee who worked with Cason during the Bush administration, "Griles would have whatever idea, and Jim would figure out how to get it implemented. He's quite effective at doing that. He was known as Griles's hatchet man."

But unlike Griles, who was sentenced to 10 months in prison after lying to Congress about his ties to the disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, Cason has largely avoided the public eye. His personal style is exceedingly restrained, particularly in contrast with more flamboyant and controversial colleagues like Griles, who was known for being a brash talker with a volatile temper. Cason has a monotone way of speaking; he often dresses in a subdued blue suit and tie and seems to go out of his way to be agreeable. In an [appearance on C-SPAN](#) in 2005, as the Abramoff investigations were gaining momentum, a caller described Cason as a "Republican toady" and attacked the DOI for its policies toward Native Americans. Cason replied evenly, "OK, well, that's certainly a good point of view too."

Even when not behind the scenes at the DOI, Cason maintained a low profile. He's never worked as a registered lobbyist. During the Clinton administration, he lived in Western New York and was vice president of risk management at a company that manufactures ceramic-fiber products for industrial applications. More recently, he's done consulting work for Booz Allen Hamilton and Kelly Anderson & Associates (now KAA Federal Solutions), a business-management firm that works with federal and industrial clients. On his financial-disclosure form, submitted

in July, Cason provided so few details about the contracting work he'd done with the Quapaw tribe in Oklahoma that, after queries by ProPublica, the DOI was forced to submit a revised version. In it, Cason revealed that over a five-month period in 2016, he'd earned \$50,000 doing "research" for the tribe. (The department's ethics lawyer called the omission an "oversight.")

KAA chief executive officer Tim Vigotsky, who hired Cason in 2012, describes him as a policy wonk who knows the DOI better than anyone. "There's not a lot of flash," Vigotsky said. "He works long hours—whatever it takes." Because Cason wasn't registered as a lobbyist at Booz Allen or Kelly Anderson, it's unclear who his clients in the energy sector might have been. Vigotsky called Kelly Anderson's list a "who's who" of the industry but wouldn't reveal the names of private clients. Much of the firm's work involves providing assistance to companies seeking federal contracts. On his résumé, Cason stated that, in addition to providing consulting support for Native American, commercial, and federal clients, he helped to "network access to government officials."

**A** window into what has otherwise been a veiled career opened in 1989, when Cason was nominated to serve as assistant secretary for natural resources and environment at the Department of Agriculture under George H.W. Bush. Few people had ever heard of Cason, who was only 35 when his confirmation hearings took place. The position is typically filled by noncontroversial policy experts, and the hearings are rarely the stuff of high-stakes political theater. But Cason's nomination was unusually contentious, in large part because of his former boss—James Watt, one of the most polarizing and unpopular interior secretaries ever to hold the position.

As the DOI's head under Ronald Reagan, Watt was known for his staunch support of property rights and for his attempts to sell millions of acres of public lands to drilling and mining interests; he resigned in 1983, after stating that a coal advisory commission he'd established was balanced because it included "a black...a woman, two Jews, and a cripple." In his opening remarks at Cason's hearing, Senator Leahy wasted little time in drawing a parallel between Cason and Watt.

“Frankly, we do not need a James Watt clone in this position,” Leahy said. Jim Cubie, Leahy’s counsel, said they’d heard from a number of sources that “this guy’s going to be a disaster.... Anybody who was a Watt acolyte was trouble.”

In written testimony, Cason said he’d barely gotten to know Watt and “could not fairly or knowledgeably compare or contrast our philosophies.” Yet Cason revealed that his philosophy was in fact closely aligned with Watt’s when he faced a series of questions about his decision to approve the transfer of tens of thousands of acres of public land at below-market rates in 1986. The episode involved the sale of oil-shale claims to energy companies at \$2.50 an acre; weeks later, some of the same land was sold to private developers at 800 times the original price, reaping a windfall of \$37 million for the energy companies. Asked by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND) whether the sale was “in the public interest,” Cason replied: “I think it is in the public interest to assure that we properly address private-property rights.” In that single sentence, Cason summed up Watt’s worldview.

**“The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.”**

But the hearing wasn’t only a referendum on Watt—it demonstrated that Cason put his own stamp on a number of decisions that heavily favored industry. Cason’s involvement in the alleged suppression of a BLM report on the dangers to the spotted owl dominated press accounts of the hearings. At the time, there was great concern among conservationists that the logging of old-growth forests in Oregon would lead to the owl’s demise. Indeed, several studies carried out in the 1980s demonstrated that the forests were key to the species’s survival. The BLM report commissioned by Cason found that the spotted owl would be imperiled if logging continued. Cason later claimed that the report didn’t live up to the department’s scientific standards—but several individuals involved in the review testified that Cason simply disagreed with their conclusions and had asked the DOI to bury the report. After news of the report leaked to the press, Cason had the DOI release what many felt was a watered-down version of the original. (“Jim Cason is a seasoned Department of the Interior official who brings decades of

government, private sector, and personal experience to the position,” a DOI spokesperson wrote in response to questions about his record, including the owl report. “We are lucky to have him.”)

Cason had also pushed through a series of industry-friendly measures in the final weeks of the Reagan administration. He lowered the royalties paid for coal mined on public lands; authorized a rule that made it possible for companies to mine in national parks or on Forest Service land (a rule considered so over the top that it was quickly withdrawn); traveled to Colorado to encourage—yet again—the transfer of thousands of acres of oil-shale claims at rock-bottom prices; and brokered an agreement with several major oil and gas companies that essentially undermined the federal government’s authority to audit royalty payments. Not only did Cason reach the latter deal without consulting state or tribal officials, whose constituents stood to lose out on millions in annual payments, but he also signed the agreement on letterhead from the industry’s attorneys. R. Max Peterson, then the executive vice president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, described Cason’s actions as “an inexcusable betrayal of the public trust.”

Even Republican members of the traditionally conservative Senate Agriculture Committee had their doubts. Summing up Cason’s years at the DOI, Indiana Senator Richard Lugar said: “The whole department, and yourself as part of that department, were overly solicitous of business and industry points of view.” Several weeks later, realizing that he didn’t have enough votes to secure the nomination, Cason withdrew his name.

**All** of that must have seemed like a distant memory this past summer, when Cason addressed a roomful of industry executives at the Colorado Oil and Gas Association’s annual energy summit in Denver. He spoke alongside Gale Norton, who had been the interior secretary for much of George W. Bush’s administration. Cason’s current post is the same one he held under Norton—but this time around, according to interviews with more than a half-dozen current and former DOI employees, he wields significantly more power. (Norton, who took a position with Royal Dutch Shell after leaving office in 2006, now runs her own consulting

firm—Norton Regulatory Strategies—and works closely with the oil and gas industry.)

With a list of the summit's major sponsors—BP, Anadarko, Noble Energy—projected on the wall behind him, Cason explained that Donald Trump's win in November marked a profound shift in direction. Though few would describe the Department of the Interior, even under President Obama, as unfriendly to oil and gas producers, Cason declared that the Trump administration had inherited “an anti-energy bias” and a “preservationist thought process” that needed rooting out.

**“There's not a lot of flash. He works long hours—whatever it takes.”**

While the DOI has often struggled to balance its dual mandate of conservation and resource development, the scales have now tipped decisively in favor of the oil and gas industry. As a candidate, Trump promised to “unleash America's \$50 trillion in untapped shale, oil, and natural-gas reserves, plus hundreds of years in clean-coal reserves”—a grandiose statement that has nonetheless become a kind of blueprint for his Department of the Interior. The long-held goal of “energy independence”—a stock phrase used by every administration at least since the Carter years—has been replaced by one of “energy dominance.” Trump officials believe that achieving it requires an aggressive push for increased access to public lands, including national monuments and offshore oil and gas reserves.

The DOI, as the largest landowner in the United States—managing roughly 500 million acres, one-fifth of the country's landmass—is at the heart of this effort. The department also administers millions of acres in offshore oil and gas reserves. Trump has already reversed an Obama-era ban on drilling along part of the Atlantic coast and in the environmentally sensitive waters around Alaska. Now, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and Republicans in Congress are seeking to fulfill one of the industry's long-sought goals: opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the largest unexplored and undeveloped onshore basin in the United States. In December, the BLM will offer approximately 10.3 million acres of land in Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve for oil and

gas leasing. And next spring, the department will hold the largest oil- and gas-lease sale in the country's history when it auctions off some 77 million acres of offshore reserves in the Gulf of Mexico.

Recently, the DOI announced that it would be running its operations more like a business, with the primary objective of generating revenue through energy production. According to a July report in *Bloomberg News*, Zinke is pushing to "retool the agency into a federal profit center." The DOI's climate-change webpage has undergone a makeover, too. Sometime between February and April, the department replaced a lengthy informational page with two short paragraphs describing the DOI's preservation duties; the phrase "climate change" appears just once. And in April, the BLM—which is tasked with overseeing oil and gas leasing on federal land—changed the image on its home page from one of a couple of backpackers looking out onto a scenic landscape to a shot of a massive coal seam in Wyoming (an image that has since been removed).

In Denver, Cason reiterated that the DOI was more interested in facilitating energy development than regulating it; he told the roomful of oil and gas executives that they represented "a very important industry for the Department of Interior and the administration." About a month after the conference, the DOI submitted a draft of its strategic vision for the next five years to the Office of Management and Budget. According to a copy of the plan obtained by *The Nation*, the department's priorities include accelerating the exploitation of "vast amounts" of untapped energy reserves on public lands. The outline makes no mention of climate change—a phrase that appeared dozens of times in the previous strategic plan.

In October, the DOI released a report detailing the burdens on energy development and recommending sweeping changes that would undermine its own basic regulatory authority. The high-profile targets included a 2015 rule requiring rudimentary safeguards for fracking on public lands, as well as a conservation plan for the imperiled sage grouse. The report also raised the possibility of eliminating the federally required land-management plans that might limit drilling in certain areas; the conditions placed on development that affects endangered species

or critical habitat; and even the collection of basic data related to energy production, which critics see as an attempt to muddy an already opaque process. Jeremy Nichols of the advocacy group Wild Earth Guardians called the proposed elimination of these common-sense measures “shocking even for this administration.”

The Department of the Interior is made up of nine bureaus, including the BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service, with 70,000 employees and state and regional offices across the country. Secretary Zinke, a former Navy SEAL and one-term US congressman, has no experience managing such a large, decentralized bureaucracy, and he has relied heavily on his political appointees to run the department’s day-to-day operations. With Cason at the helm, a small circle of insiders orchestrated the aggressive deregulatory agenda and the unprecedented reshuffling of career staff.

“Cason is really an administrator,” a DOI employee who has known him since the George W. Bush administration told me. “He understands how to run an organization.” The position Cason now holds—associate deputy secretary—was created especially for him when he joined the Bush administration, most likely because of fears that he would not make it through another round of confirmation hearings. “They didn’t even try for a nomination, because they knew it would be dead on arrival,” said another former DOI employee who worked closely with Cason at the time.

In his remarks in Denver, Cason said it was evident from day one that career employees needed “an attitude adjustment.” New leadership, he continued, would force them to “adopt a different way of looking at things.” (In a recent speech before the National Petroleum Council, Interior Secretary Zinke described “30 percent” of DOI employees as “not loyal to the flag.”) As a member of the Executive Resources Board, which is responsible for senior-executive-level reassignments, Cason has overseen a series of personnel changes that appear designed to enhance the administration’s pro-oil-and-gas orientation. Under Zinke, the ERB is made up entirely of political appointees, despite strong recommendations from the Office of Personnel Management that the board include a mix of political and career employees “to provide...a

balanced perspective.” According to Elizabeth Klein, who occupied Cason’s role in the Obama administration and served on the ERB for part of that time, there was a rough split between civil servants and political appointees.

The “Thursday-night massacre” occurred on June 15, when more than two dozen of the department’s Senior Executive Service (SES) employees, from nearly every agency, received memos informing them of the reassignments. None of the employees that *The Nation* spoke with were consulted in advance, which is considered both a common courtesy and responsible management. In most cases, even agency directors were kept in the dark until just before the memos went out. When one high-level supervisor asked if they were on the list, Cason reportedly replied, “Not this round.” The reassignments sent shock waves throughout the DOI. Dan Ashe, former director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said the transfers were clearly designed to disrupt the normal order of things and to undermine the authority of senior civil servants. Cason, who had served as chief human-capital officer under Bush, was intimately familiar with the SES and personally knew many of the employees who were transferred.

**“What they are doing to hand the keys over to the energy industry is pretty astounding.”**

Among those reassigned was Joel Clement, a senior policy adviser and widely respected climate scientist, who was moved to an accounting office overseeing royalty collection from the fossil-fuel industry. Clement later [filed a whistle-blower complaint](#) alleging that his reassignment was politically motivated; he has since resigned. In his departing letter, Clement blasted senior-level appointees for being “shackled to special interests such as oil, gas, and mining.” Virginia Burkett, who oversaw climate-science research at the US Geological Survey, was transferred to an undefined advisory role in the office of the assistant secretary for water and science; she ended up leaving the SES and returning to a lower-grade position. Cindy Dohner, the Fish and Wildlife Service’s highly respected Southeast regional director, who oversaw restoration efforts in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP disaster, was reassigned to serve as the agency’s director for international affairs. She resigned

instead.

“It made people very afraid to make decisions about things or to advocate for what we would call ‘good government,’” said Debra Sonderman, who was moved after almost 20 years in her role as director of acquisition and property management. Sonderman, too, has resigned.

According to numerous reports, the DOI is planning another series of reassignments. Rumors have been circulating since June that they could be announced at any time. One former DOI employee said that the list has already been compiled, but the department is waiting for the inspector general’s investigation to conclude before pulling the trigger. “Everybody is looking over their shoulder,” said Ashe, the former Fish and Wildlife Service director.

Unlike other departments that have displayed a shocking level of dysfunction—a kind of embodiment of the Trump presidency itself—the DOI is operating with ruthless efficiency. This is largely due to the presence of experienced appointees like Cason and David Bernhardt, Zinke’s deputy secretary, who was confirmed in late July. A former corporate lobbyist whose clients included major oil and gas producers, Bernhardt was once described by Center for Western Priorities spokesman Aaron Weiss as a “walking conflict of interest.” (Cason served as acting deputy secretary until Bernhardt’s nomination.)

A handful of other DOI officials from the George W. Bush era have resurfaced after spending the past eight years working for far-right think tanks or as industry lobbyists. Doug Domenech, most recently director of the Fueling Freedom Project, which promotes “the forgotten moral case for fossil fuels,” is now assistant secretary for insular affairs, coordinating policy for American territories in the South Pacific. Daniel Jorjani, a longtime adviser for several of the Koch brothers’ groups, is helping to craft the department’s legal policy. Scott Cameron, who spent the past several years advising a lobbying firm whose clients include Shell Oil and the Marcellus Shale Coalition, is now overseeing the DOI’s budget.

The oil and gas industry is now taking full advantage of the access offered by its allies at the department. Cason has described the DOI as having an “open-door policy,” and in the first month and a half of the

administration—before Zinke was even confirmed—met with top industry lawyers, corporate lobbyists, and industry trade groups, including the American Petroleum Institute and Peabody Energy. Zinke himself has had dozens of meetings with energy executives and lobbyists, including those from ExxonMobil and BP. He’s used taxpayer dollars to fly on a private jet owned by an oil-and-gas-exploration firm in Wyoming, and as a member of Congress he received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the industry. So far, eight of the 12 secretarial orders he’s issued have called for greater access to drilling on public lands and in offshore waters.

In June, the Independent Petroleum Association of America (IPAA) sent a midyear legislative agenda to its board of directors, announcing that the playing field for oil and gas producers has been “dramatically altered.” A copy obtained by *The Nation* shows that in just the first few months of the Trump administration, the lobbying group achieved an astonishing number of the regulatory rollbacks on its wish list, including an elimination of the fracking rule and another that would have closed a loophole allowing coal companies to calculate their own royalties on coal sold at below-market rates.

There is still a great deal that energy interests hope to accomplish during the Trump administration. Ending a rule to limit methane venting and flaring from wells is at the top of that list. Undermining protections for endangered species on federal land is another key item. A third is ensuring that future administrations are unable to finalize what the IPAA calls “harmful” air-quality regulations that it says would limit offshore development.

Kate Kelly, former senior adviser to then–Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and current director of the public-lands team at the Center for American Progress, warns that it’s difficult to appreciate just how radically the DOI’s policies have changed and what this means for the environment. “In totality, what they are doing to open up public lands to oil and gas development—to basically hand the keys over to the energy industry—is pretty astounding,” she said.

Cason shares the industry’s sense of having a rare opportunity to

reshape the policy landscape. In Denver, he mused that the midterm elections weren't too far off—and that the dynamic in the Senate, and possibly even the House, could change, making it more difficult to advance a deregulatory agenda. “You think about having four years to do things,” he said, “but for those of us who have been on the federal-government side of the fence, you don't really have four years. And if you want to effect change, you have to have a sense of urgency from day one.”

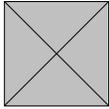
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would like to send around - this am to the team -

<https://federalnewsradio.com/ses/2017/12/interior-no-2-shares-more-insight-into-agencys-decision-to-reassign-its-senior-executives/>

Interior no. 2 details his intention and rationale for reassigning more senior executives



By **Nicole Ogrysko @nogryskoWFED**  
**December 8, 2017 5:24 pm**

**4 min read**

### **Share**

More than six months after the Interior Department reassigned 30-to-50 of its senior executives, the agency's deputy secretary is offering more insight into the role he foresees for DOI's most experienced career leaders.

In a Dec. 4 memo to all Interior senior executives, Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt detailed his vision for the agency's Senior Executive Service members.

"As I have examined our processes, consulted with the Office of Personnel Management and requested that the secretary reconstitute the membership of the [Executive Resources Board] to adopt best practices, I thought it would useful to share my understanding of the role the Senior Executive Service plays in leading the department," he wrote.

Though the memo, which Federal News Radio obtained, didn't explicitly announce plans to reassign more senior executives, it's clear Bernhardt sees these rotations as a potentially valuable management tool.

"It is my view that potentially greater cross-bureau collaboration and innovation can be achieved by bringing new leadership perspectives to our operations by rotating SES members from bureaus to headquarters, from headquarters to the field and across different functional areas and disciplines," Bernhardt wrote. "Going forward, I will seek to strike a balance between leadership continuity and achieving fresh perspective by reassigning SES employees across bureaus and offices."

Interior senior executives who were moved to new positions in June said the reassignments created a "chilling effect" in the department, and they said they feared how the agency's reorganization effort would impact the workforce when the

department's executive cadre has had "absolutely no involvement whatsoever" in crafting the agency's plans.

Bernhardt's latest memo shows Interior is trying to be more proactive and communicative with its career senior executives, said Bill Valdez, president of the Senior Executives Association.

Though it may have been wise for Interior to send such a message to its SES members six months ago, having leadership alert the agency's senior executives about its intentions is a good management practice, he said.

"This letter is perhaps an indication that they're taking a step back and being more thoughtful about what they're doing," Valdez said.

Bernhardt's memo also reminds senior executives of the principles that guide the SES under the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. Those principles, Bernhardt said, will inform his decisions as chair of the department's Executive Resources Board.

Each agency typically appoints members to serve on an Executive Resources Board (ERB), which reviews qualifications for new career applications to the SES. According to [OPM](#), these boards also advise agency heads on executive human resource management. These boards usually dissolve during a change in administration and staff back up when new leadership arrives.

Bernhardt also reminded executives of former President Barack Obama's 2015 [executive order](#), which directed agencies with more than 20 or more SES positions to rotate at least 15 percent of its members to different departments, agencies, subcomponents, functional areas or even sectors.

According to Bernhardt, Interior senior executives during the Obama administration completed 140 SES reassignments within the department. Of the executives who did rotate to other positions, few moved to different bureaus in the department, he added.

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"From my perspective, the lack of mobility can contribute to a siloed, bureau-centric approach to management," Bernhardt wrote. "Although a long length of service in one position can be a management strength, as it allows for the development of technical expertise and continuity, it can also inhibit the transfer of fresh management concepts across bureaus and offices."

Bernhardt said he also plans to focus more on strengthening executive accountability.

About 98 percent of Interior SES members received an “outstanding” or “exceeds fully successful” rating on their performance evaluation for 2016, the memo said.

“Each of you should be proud of your membership in the SES and your accomplishments as executives,” Bernhardt wrote. “I look forward to working with each of you. Thank you for your service.”

Bernhardt’s memo comes as the department’s Office of Inspector General is continuing its review of the methodology and the criteria agency leaders used to reassign SES members.

According to an email to Interior senior executives, which Federal News Radio obtained, the IG said it was meeting with impacted SES and others involved in the reassignment process. The IG also encouraged senior executives who haven’t come forward to contact the inspector general or its anonymous hotline by Nov. 10.

Meanwhile, former Interior senior executive Joel Clement, who said he was reassigned in retaliation for his statements about climate change, has filed a lawsuit against the department. Interior had yet to comply with any of Clement’s more than 30 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests related to the agency’s decision to reassign some of its career executives.

Clement resigned in October, citing poor leadership as one of the reasons for his departure.

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