



# UNWISE USE

How Anti-Environmental Extremists are Working With Trump to Privatize and Exploit Public Lands

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was written by Alan Zibel, research director of Public Citizen’s Corporate Presidency Project, with input from David Helvarg, executive director of Blue Frontier and author of “The War Against The Greens” and Jayson O’Neill, director of the Western Values Project. It was edited by Public Citizen President Robert Weissman and Public Citizen Researcher Rick Claypool.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since mid-2019, the Bureau of Land Management, a federal agency that manages 245 million acres of public land, has been led by a far-right anti-government extremist and climate change denialist, William Perry Pendley. Over several decades, Pendley has advocated for the sale and privatization of America's shared public lands. He is perhaps the most prominent example of how President Donald Trump's appointees at the U.S. Department of the Interior have pushed policies that place the interests of corporate polluters and land-privatization boosters above the environment. Many of these officials have worked for think tanks that grew out of the anti-environmental "Wise Use" movement of the 1980s and 1990s as well as pro-corporate think tanks and right-wing advocacy groups, often funded by the billionaire Koch brothers. In this report, Public Citizen has identified 17 current or former senior Trump Interior officials who have either worked at those groups or are otherwise connected to the far-right public land privatization movement. Public Citizen also examined Interior Department calendars and identified 21 meetings between top officials and conservative think tanks or legal groups.

The current leadership of the Interior Department represents an [echo](#) of President Ronald Reagan's first Interior Secretary, James Watt, who was infamous for his opposition to conservation and favoritism to corporations. Watt was a key figure in the backlash against the landmark environmental laws of the 1960s and 1970s. This anti-green revolt was led by corporations and individuals whose income was threatened by limits on unchecked grazing, mining, logging, oil and gas drilling and other extractive activities involving the exploitation of public lands in the western United States. With corporate and right-wing funding in hand, a crop of new conservative legal groups formed in the 1970s fought back against what they claimed was government encroachment on landowners' rights. These [groups](#), backed by such conservative donors as Joseph Coors and Richard Mellon Scaife as well as tobacco and energy companies, sought to [counter](#) the growing influence of consumer, environmental and civil rights legal organizations. "When you unveil these groups, what you see are big corporations masquerading in the guise of the little guy," Kathryn Hohmann of the Sierra Club [told The New York Times](#) in 1991. "In a sense it's flattering that they are using our tactics, but we see these people for what they are: the old resource exploiters."

## BACKGROUND

In 1973, the Sacramento, Calif.-based Pacific Legal Foundation was founded by former members of then-governor Ronald Reagan's staff and was backed by [members of the California Chamber of Commerce](#). The Pacific Legal Foundation [describes itself](#) as "the first public interest law firm dedicated to the principles of individual rights and limited government" and says that its attorneys "work tirelessly on behalf of vulnerable individuals and small businesses whose rights are threatened by overreaching legislative and executive power." The group [rejects](#) the allegation that it is merely a tool of large corporate interests, calling that thesis a "trope" and a "conspiracy theory" and says most

of its funding comes from individuals, estate gifts and small family foundations, [noting that](#) “a few of those companies have given modest donations to PLF in the past.” According to the Pacific Legal Foundation’s most recent [financial statement](#), the group reported more than \$65 million in assets and more than \$14 million in annual revenue as of mid-2019.

**“Everywhere you look today, our liberty is under attack. Whether it’s big government agencies, well-funded liberal special interest groups, or unaccountable bureaucrats, the enemies of liberty never stop looking for ways to increase their power over the lives of private citizens.” – Mountain States Legal Foundation website**

Another group with similar goals was launched just a few years later. In 1976, beer magnate Joseph Coors and a Washington, D.C.,-based umbrella group, the [National Legal Center for the Public Interest](#), founded the Mountain States Legal Foundation, based in Colorado. In mid-1977, the group [hired](#) Watt, a conservative lawyer from Wyoming who worked in the Interior Department during the Nixon administration, as the group’s first president. “We realized we needed to counter what the liberal, socialist (environmental) groups were doing,” Watt [told High Country News](#) in 2007.

The goal of Mountain States was to oppose clean air, clean water and public land protections in court, bring lawsuits on behalf of businesses and fight federal ownership of public land. The group often frames the interests of big corporations and large landholders in Western lore as those of small-time ranchers, cowboys and local businesspeople. As Mountain States says on its website, “Everywhere you look today, our liberty is under attack. Whether it’s big government agencies, well-funded liberal special interest groups, or unaccountable bureaucrats, the enemies of liberty never stop looking for ways to increase their power over the lives of private citizens.” At the end of 2019,

Mountain States [reported](#) \$11 million in assets and nearly \$1.8 million in revenue. The first Mountain States cases followed the agenda of its conservative, pro-corporate funders. [Those cases included](#) opposition to an affirmative action program at the University of Colorado’s law school, a push to limit health and safety inspections at businesses and opposition to lower utility rates for the elderly under the rationale that such rates harm other customers.

**“We realized we needed to counter what the liberal, socialist (environmental) groups were doing.” – James Watt, former Interior Secretary and first president of the Mountain States Legal Foundation**

Watt left Mountain States to become [Interior secretary](#) in the Reagan administration, where he was infamous for his [abrasive personality](#) and hostility to the environment. Watt proposed opening wilderness areas to drilling and mining, weakening the Endangered Species Act and massively ramping up offshore oil leasing. Besides Watt, several other

Mountain States alumni [populated the Reagan administration](#). The Rolling Stone writer William Greider [wrote in 1983](#) that Watt “is both the best-known member of Ronald Reagan’s cabinet and the most despised. Americans simply do not share his rip-and-ruin view of our natural resources, land, water, parks and wilderness.” After a controversial tenure at the Interior Department, Watt [stepped down](#) in October 1983, weeks after describing the diverse makeup of a federal coal commission in [highly offensive terms](#) saying, “We have every kind of mix you can have. I have a black, I have a woman, two Jews and a cripple. And we have talent.”

Both Watt and Reagan famously [sympathized](#) with the “Sagebrush Rebellion” – a 1970s effort to push for more resource exploitation on federal lands and turn over control to the states. Watt [favored going further](#), advocating for either selling off public lands or leasing them out at bargain-basement prices. However, the idea foundered amid protests from both environmentalists and real estate interests fearful that too much property being dumped on the market would sink land prices.

By the mid-1980s, the Reagan Administration’s land-transfer efforts had [fizzled](#), but efforts to promote corporate interests and privatization continued apace, with nonprofit advocacy groups taking the lead. A common strategy was to use [astroturf front groups with anodyne-sounding names](#) such as “Northwesterners for More Fish,” “Friends of Eagle Mountain” and the “National Wetlands Coalition” to cover an agenda of environmental destruction and private profit.

[Two key figures](#) in the anti-environmental movement in the late 1980s and 1990s were [Ron Arnold](#), a former technical writer and timber industry communications consultant and a disaffected former Sierra Club member who wrote a [fawning biography of James Watt](#). Arnold [joined](#) the conservative activist and direct mail fundraising expert [Alan Gottlieb](#) at the Bellevue, Wash.-based Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise in 1984, which Gottlieb had founded. The pair appeared to take pleasure in provocative anti-environmental statements. Gottlieb called the environmental movement “the perfect bogeyman” for conservatives in a 1991 [interview](#) with The New York Times. In recent years, Gottlieb has become an anti-gun control activist and is the founder of the Second Amendment Foundation.



A18 L THE NEW YORK TIMES NATIONAL THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1991

## Fund-Raisers Tap Anti-Environmentalism

By TIMOTHY EGAN  
Special to The New York Times

SEATTLE, Dec. 13 — In the world of mail-order fund-raising, it helps to have what Alan M. Gottlieb calls "an evil empire": the specter of an enemy to raise potential contributors' fears and open their wallets.

For conservative fund-raisers like Mr. Gottlieb, the enemies were Senator Edward M. Kennedy or the threat of rural control.

But now Mr. Gottlieb has found a better target. "For us," said Mr. Gottlieb, who runs a vast direct-mail network from his headquarters in the Seattle suburb of Bellevue, "the environmental movement has become the perfect bogeyman."

**New 125-Member Coalition**

Mr. Gottlieb is the most successful fund-raiser working to tap a growing movement of loggers, ranchers, miners, oil drillers, distillers, hunters and others who view big environmental groups as a threat to their livelihood and way of life.

The movement took a big step in visibility last month as 125 groups agreed to put some of their differences aside and organize under a single banner as the Alliance for America. By joining, their hope is to have more influence in the debate over the nation's major environmental issues. While Mr. Gottlieb is not a member, he raises money for many groups that are.

The targets of these groups — from mainstream environmental organizations like the Sierra Club to the radical fringe of the Earth First movement — see the hand of the oil, timber and mining industries behind the new coalition.

"When you unveil these groups, what you see are big corporations masquerading in the guise of the little guy," said Kathryn Hohmann, a lobbyist for the Sierra Club. "In a sense it's flattering that they are using our tactics, but we see them mainly for what they are: corporations and are just now hitting stride.

"The Wise-Use Agenda," calls for opening up national parks to logging and mining, oil-drilling on wildlife refuges and the systematic cutting of all

Mr. Arnold, who also does not belong to the Alliance for America, and Mr. Gottlieb work for the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise, a not-for-profit.

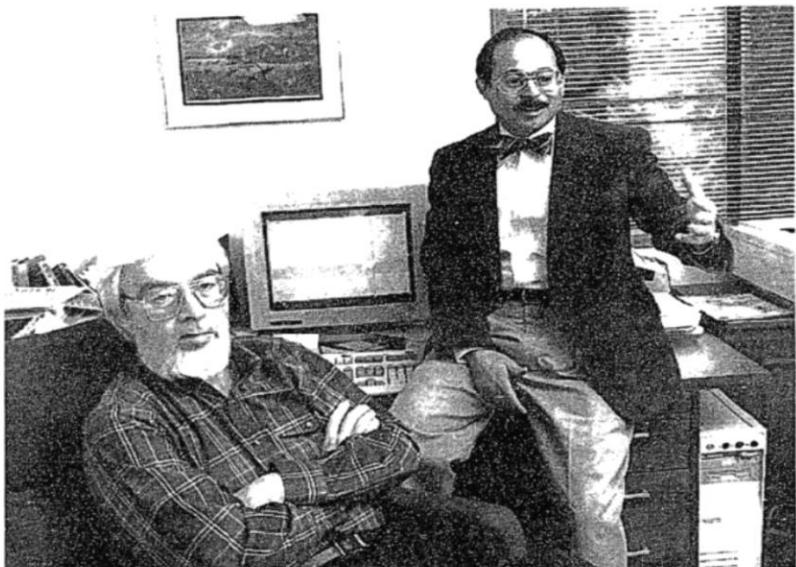


Photo by Doug Wilson for The New York Times

"The environmental movement has become the perfect bogeyman," said Alan M. Gottlieb, right, a conservative fund-raiser in Bellevue, Wash. With him was his partner, Ron Arnold.

portation bill that included a provision allocating some money from the Federal gasoline tax for building trails on Federal land for use by off-road motorized vehicles. President Bush signed

A 1991 New York Times [story](#) on conservative anti-environmentalism.

In August 1988, Gottlieb and Arnold's Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise held a national conference [at the Nugget Hotel in Reno, Nevada](#). Entitled the "Multiple Use Strategy Conference," it attracted between 200 and 300 people. In a 25-point [manifesto](#) entitled "The Wise Use Agenda" published after the event, the group called for oil development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, logging of three million acres of national forest in Alaska, fighting climate change by cutting down old-growth trees and letting new ones grow in their place, gutting the Endangered Species Act, and opening wilderness and national parks to mining and oil and gas exploration.

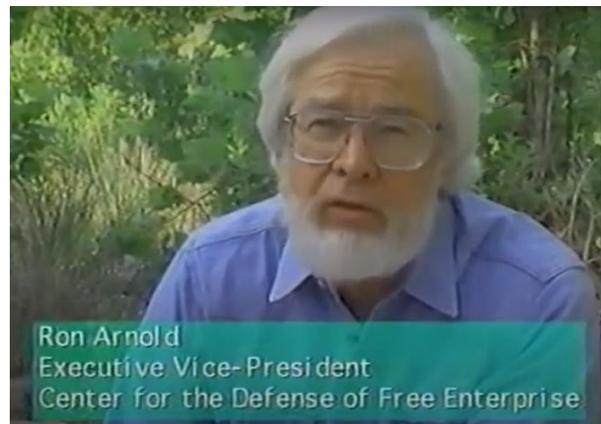
## SECTION I THE TOP TWENTY-FIVE GOALS

**1. Initiation of a Wise Use Public Education Project by the U.S. Forest Service explaining the wise commodity use of the national forests and all federal resource lands. An important message is that the federal deficit can be reduced through prudent development of federal lands. A public outreach action plan and implementation shall be accomplished using print and electronic media to reach the broadest possible public with the commodity use story of the National Forest System.**

**2. Immediate wise development of the petroleum resources of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska as a model project showing careful development with full protection of environmental values.**

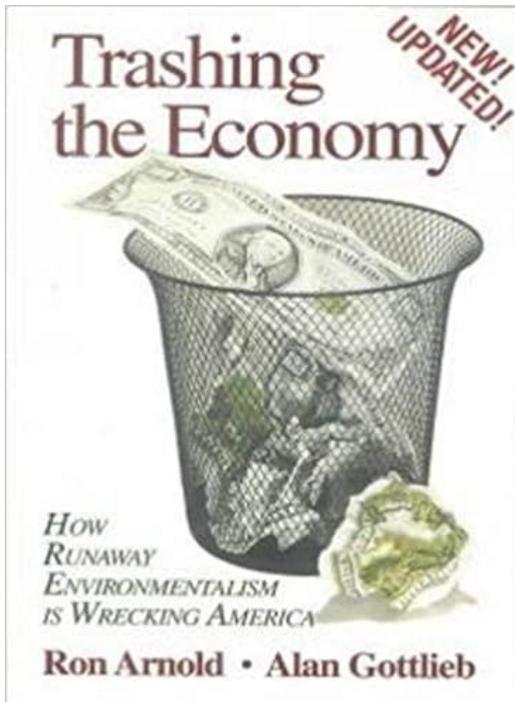
The “Wise Use Agenda” [manifesto](#) discussed promoting the “commodity use” of the national forests for deficit reduction and oil drilling in Alaska.

Supporters and participants of the conference were listed at the end of the publication and included the California Chamber of Commerce, Exxon, DuPont, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the National Rifle Association, and numerous snowmobile, farming, ranching, timber and mining groups. This publication sought to cover up this corporate agenda with rhetorical gloss, saying attendees at the conference sought a “middle way between extreme environmentalism and extreme industrialism.” But Arnold and other right-wing advocates associated with the Wise Use movement have long warned in dark, hyperbolic terms about the environmental movement. Arnold said in a 1991 [interview](#) with the Times that, “We created a sector of public opinion” that previously didn’t exist. “No one was aware that environmentalism was a problem until we came along.” In a 1995 [documentary](#) entitled “Behind the Green



Arnold was interviewed in a 1995 [documentary](#) “that took aim at the environmental movement in dark terms

Curtain: Environmentalism vs. Property Rights,” Arnold claims that “environmentalism has become one of the greatest threats to personal liberties, to private property rights, to free enterprise that we have ever seen in this country.” The 40-minute video presents a



dark picture of the environmental movement, depicting major environmental groups as a tool of large foundations focused on taking private property from private landowners, and a weapon of “financial elites” and monopolists destroying private property rights. “This grassroots movement that everybody loved in 1970 has become a tool of big money interests around the world,” Arnold says.

In 1991, Arnold [told The Washington Post](#) that the environmental movement had been “corrupted by a few leaders who had their own personal demons, and they set themselves up as gurus of an anti-human, quasi-religious philosophy. Both Gottlieb and Arnold had [extensive ties](#) to the Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church network. That association, as well as Arnold’s extreme rhetoric, caused

nervousness among more mainstream business groups. In a 1993 piece for Public Eye magazine, William Kevin Burke [wrote](#):

Both the National Farm Bureau Federation and the Oregon Lands Coalition later disavowed any association with Alan Gottlieb’s Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise and the term Wise Use. Groups that portray themselves as moderate Wise Users, like the Farm Bureau and Alliance for America, now describe their approach with substitute terms like “multiple use,” while still employing Ron Arnold’s tactics and inviting him to speak at Wise Use conferences. This distancing is apparently due to Arnold’s willingness to make extreme statements to the press and the baggage of his association with Rev. Moon’s Unification Church.

During the George W. Bush administration, the anti-environmental movement refocused from promoting mining and timber toward the interests of energy exploitation. Under Bush’s Interior Secretary, Gale Norton, who [worked](#) as an attorney for the Mountain States Legal Foundation and as Colorado’s attorney general, aggressively [pursued](#) efforts to open up public lands to oil and gas interests, including the [removal of wilderness protections](#) from more than 6 million acres in Utah.

The Wise Use movement has also expanded at the state level since 2010, with officials in Western states pushing the federal government to turn over millions of acres of public

lands to the states. A 2013 [report](#) by the Center for American Progress called these efforts “nothing more than corporate-backed messaging tools that can be traced to conservative front groups.” The two main groups backing this effort have been the [American Legislative Exchange Council](#) (ALEC) and Americans for Prosperity, both of which are closely tied to Koch Industries and other fossil fuel companies.

County governments as well as Americans for Prosperity [funded](#) the American Lands Council, a group led by Ken Ivory, a former Republican state representative from Utah who was [working](#) to promote the idea that state and local officials can claim land owned by the federal government.

A report by the Center for Western Priorities [documented close ideological similarities](#) between the land privatization movement and far-right extremists such as the Bundy family and the militia movement. The New York Times [wrote](#) that “many conservatives – Mr. Ivory among them – criticized Mr. Bundy’s gun-toting tactics, but their grievances and goals are nearly identical.” Ivory [resigned](#) from the Utah legislature in August 2019 to work for a software company that he had helped hire to appraise Utah’s public lands, according to the Salt Lake Tribune.



Utah Rep Fights Federal Land Grab  
The Alex Jones Channel  
7,305

Alex Jones, a prolific conspiracy theorist, hosts the talk show “Infowars.” Rep. Ivory has appeared on Jones’ show to discuss the sell-off of public lands.



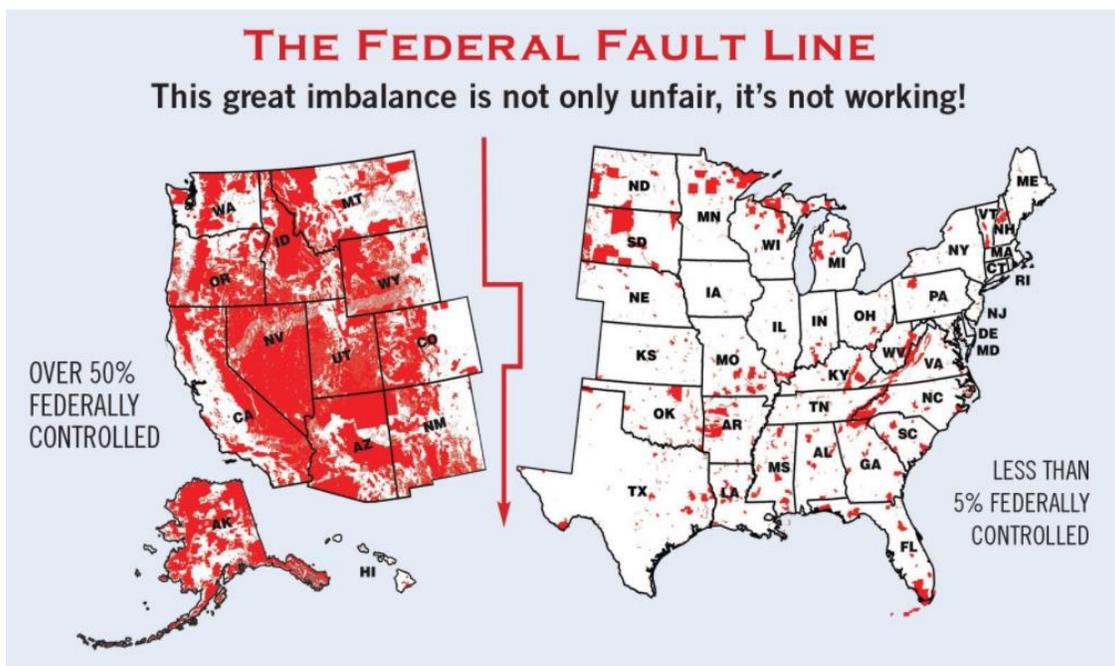
Ken Ivory on Glenn Beck Radio Discussing the Transfer of Public Lands  
ALEC  
1,330

Glenn Beck, a conspiracy theorist and conservative political commentator, has interviewed Rep. Ivory on his work on public land seizure and called him a “hero.”

Source: [Center for Western Priorities](#)

The state-level ALEC network [created model bills](#) used by state legislatures to advance the cause of land transfer, which has been rejected in the courts as plainly [unconstitutional](#). The Center for Western Priorities [report](#) found that more than 50 land seizure bills had been introduced in Western states since the start of 2015, and found that 29 of those bills were sponsored by state lawmakers with connections to anti-government ideologies or extremist groups. Far-right extremists involved in armed standoffs with government officials in Oregon and Nevada, “share the same foundations as land transfer schemes promoted by some elected leaders in states throughout the West,” the report found. “Both rely upon a philosophy based in vehement anti-government ideologies, both

have connections to organizations that espouse armed resistance, both employ pseudo-legal theories to justify their actions, and both use scholarly support from conspiracy theorists and discredited academics.” In the summer of 2018, Trump [pardoned](#) two Oregon cattle ranchers who had been sentenced to prison on charges of arson on public lands – a case that led to the 41-day [standoff](#) with federal authorities.



In assessing the Wise Use movement’s impact, David Helvar, author of the 1994 book, “The War Against the Greens,” wrote in an essay for HuffPost that:

The Wise Use movement achieved quite a bit: A mining law virtually untouched since 1872 allows companies to lay claim to U.S. public lands for less than \$5 an acre, without paying royalties on the \$400 billion they’ve extracted to date; the cost of grazing permits for cattle have dropped to a new low monthly rate of \$1.37 per animal per acre under Trump versus \$22.60 average per animal per acre on private Western lands; and federal agencies are selling off public timber and opening up more land for oil and gas pipelines.

### The Trump Plan for Private Profit off Public Lands

After the November 2016 election, the incoming Trump administration sought to reverse the Obama administration’s environmental policies, advocating for policies that were in many ways [reminiscent](#) of the Reagan administration. Pro-privatization interests immediately seized upon the opportunity to pursue a similar agenda to the Wise Use and Sagebrush Rebellion groups that came before them. An [opinion piece](#) by Americans for Prosperity, the group founded by billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, called in

early 2017 for Trump's Interior Department to open up federal lands and waters for energy exploration and economic development. "A small portion of this area is rightly set aside as national parks and other nature preserves, but the rest is completely blocked off from the public and is essentially unused," the piece said.

As Public Citizen highlighted in a 2017 report "[The Koch Government](#)," several Koch lieutenants and anti-environment activists and climate denial veterans [entered the Trump orbit](#), running the transition teams and ultimately the leadership of the Interior and Energy departments as well as the Environmental Protection Agency. Notably, Myron Ebell, a [prominent climate denier](#) at the Competitive Enterprise Institute who was in charge of the Trump transition team for the EPA, [has a long history of involvement with the Wise Use movement](#). Ebell got his start in the nation's capital as the Washington lobbyist for the American Land Rights Association, a Wise Use group [formed](#) to "protect private property landholders from unwanted acquisition by the National Park Service." Ebell also was a key figure in [pushing](#) the George W. Bush administration to reject the Kyoto protocol and climate-related regulation in general.

Alumni of Wise Use groups and Koch-funded think tanks quickly took ranking roles at the Interior Department under Trump's first Interior Secretary, Ryan Zinke. "Many of those appointees spent the Obama years working for the oil and gas industry — and they come to the Interior Department with an insider's knowledge of how its levers work and a wish list of policies from their former employers," The New York Times [wrote](#). At the start of the Trump administration, Zinke claimed to be an ally of public lands advocates. In 2016, Zinke, a Montana congressman at the time, [resigned as a delegate](#) to the Republican National Convention over the party's support for transferring federal lands to the states. "Quite frankly, most Republicans don't agree with it and most Montanans don't agree with it," Zinke [told The Billings Gazette](#) about transferring federal lands to the states. "What we do agree on is better management." In April 2017, Zinke said, "[I am absolutely against transfer and sale of public lands](#)." In 2018, as Zinke met with ALEC, he said "[no one loves public land as much as I do](#)."

In the end, however, the Trump administration's record on conservation has been catastrophic under Zinke and his successor, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt. Often described as the [ultimate D.C. swamp creature](#), Bernhardt is a former fossil fuel lobbyist who found himself the subject of a [multi-faceted investigation](#) into allegations of ethics violations surrounding conflicts of interest involving former clients after just a few months on the job. A Public Citizen [report](#) in January 2020 found that former Bernhardt clients had spent nearly \$30 million lobbying the federal government since the start of the Trump administration. The Center for American Progress estimates that the administration [has removed or proposed to remove protections](#) for nearly 35 million acres of public lands, an area the size of Florida. Trump is the only president in history to have removed more public lands from protection than he protected, the CAP report said. Most recently, the Trump administration [finalized](#) a plan to open up a part of the Arctic

National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, fulfilling a longtime Wise Use goal and a top priority for [Trump officials](#) who have pushed hard to complete an oil lease sale before the end of Trump's first term.

Public Citizen was able to identify 17 current or former senior Trump Interior officials who have either worked at Wise Use or right-wing think tanks or are otherwise connected to the far-right land privatization movement. Public Citizen also analyzed Interior Department calendars and identified 21 examples of meetings between top Trump Interior Department officials and conservative think tanks or legal groups.

**Table 1: Current Senior Interior Officials Connected to Right-Wing Think Tanks, Advocacy Groups and Land Privatization Advocates**

First Name	Last Name	Title	Background
Kathleen	Benedetto	Special Assistant to the Interior Secretary	Women's Mining Coalition, People for the West/People for the USA!, Montanans for Common Sense Water Laws, National Wilderness Institute, U.S. House of Representatives, Bioxy Research
Karen	Budd-Falen	Deputy Solicitor for Parks and Wildlife	Interior Dept., Mountain States Legal Foundation, Budd-Falen Law Offices
Doug	Domenech	Assistant Secretary, Insular and International Affairs	Texas Public Policy Foundation, Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources, Artemis Strategies, Interior Department, National Center for Home Education, American Pulpwood Association, Forest Resources Association
Robert	Gordon	Adviser to the director, U.S. Geological Survey	National Wilderness Institute (defunct) U.S. House of Representatives, Heritage Foundation, Competitive Enterprise Institute
Daniel	Jorjani	Solicitor	Freedom Partners, Charles Koch Institute, Akin Gump
Gary	Lawkowski	Counselor to the Secretary	Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce
Stephen	Lechner	Administrative Law judge	Mountain States Legal Foundation
Brandon	Middleton	Deputy Solicitor, Water Resources	Pacific Legal Foundation, Harrison, Temblador, Hungerford and Johnson, Sen. David Vitter (R.-La), Sen. Jeff Sessions (R.-Ala.), U.S. Department of Justice
Lori	Mashburn	White House liaison	Trump presidential campaign, Heritage Foundation, Institute on Religion and Democracy
William Perry	Pendley	Bureau of Land Management deputy director for policy and programs, exercising the authority of the director	Mountain States Legal Foundation, Interior Department, U.S. House of Representatives
Christopher	Prandoni	Administrative law judge	Americans for Tax Reform, former staffer for Sen. Mike Lee (R.-Utah)

First Name	Last Name	Title	Background
Hubbel	Relat	Deputy Solicitor/General Law	Fueling U.S. Forward, American Energy Alliance, Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce, i360, HRR Strategies, Americans for Prosperity
Timothy	Williams	Deputy Director, External and Intergovernmental Affairs	Americans for Prosperity

**Table 2: Former Interior Department Officials Connected to Right-Wing Think Tanks, Advocacy Groups and Land Privatization Advocates**

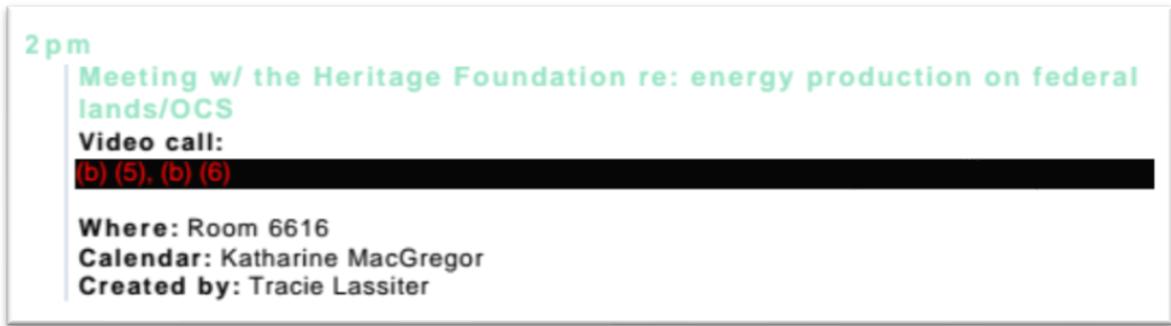
First Name	Last Name	Title	Background
Susan	Combs	Former Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget	Texas Public Policy Foundation
Landon Tucker	Davis	Former Policy Advisor, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement	Faces of Coal/Count on Coal; Americans for Prosperity; Republican political campaigns, Trump campaign, Virginia Rising Action
Brian	Steed	Former director, programs and policy, Bureau of Land Management.	Former chief of staff to Rep. Chris Stewart (R.-Utah)
Todd	Wynn	Former Director of Intergovernmental and External Affairs	American Legislative Exchange Council, Edison Electric Institute, Cascade Policy Institute, Arizona Public Service

In a comprehensive examination of corporate influence on the Interior Department, Public Citizen previously identified [679 external meetings](#) with non-government entities on the calendars of Interior Secretary David Bernhardt and five top aides from January 2017 to May 2019.



The calendars reveal numerous meetings with the Competitive Enterprise Institute’s Myron Ebell, as well as meetings with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, the executive vice president the Mountain States Legal Foundation, and the executive director of Texas-based American Stewards of Liberty, a [Texas-based nonprofit](#) that says it “works directly with local communities to help protect the continued use of our natural resources – the production of food, fiber and energy and access to the land – in the face of an increasing influence of the radical environmental agenda that is working to remove people from the landscape.”

Source: [Schedule](#) of David Bernhardt.



Source: Oct. 26, 2017 calendar [entry](#) for Interior Dept. official Katharine MacGregor.

**Table 3: Right-Wing Think Tanks, Advocacy Groups and Land Privatization Advocates Holding Meetings With Interior Department**

Date/Link	Group	Contact/Topic	Interior Official	Title
<a href="#">3/10/2017</a> <a href="#">3/10/2017</a>	Competitive Enterprise Institute/ Property Rights Groups	Myron Ebell	Doug Domenech Kathleen Benedetto, Daniel Jorjani	Various
<a href="#">3/23/2017</a>	John Locke Foundation	Don van der Vaart	Domenech, Virginia Johnson	Various
<a href="#">3/28/2017</a>	Alliance Defending Freedom	Gary McCaleb	Doug Domenech	Assistant Secretary, Insular and International Affairs
<a href="#">4/5/2017</a>	Texas Public Policy Foundation	Rob Hennek	Doug Domenech, James Cason, Daniel Jorjani, Casey Hammond	Various
<a href="#">4/6/2017</a>	Texas Public Policy Foundation	Rob Hennek	Doug Domenech, James Cason, Daniel Jorjani, Katharine MacGregor	Various
<a href="#">4/19/2017</a>	CO2 Coalition	Harrison Schmitt	Doug Domenech	Assistant Secretary, Insular and International Affairs
<a href="#">7/21/2017</a>	American Stewards of Liberty	Margaret Byfield	Katharine MacGregor/Kathleen Benedetto	Various
<a href="#">8/3/2017</a>	Heritage Foundation	Thomas Spoehr,	David Bernhardt, James Cason, Downey Magallanes, Scott Cameron	Various
<a href="#">10/26/2017</a>	Heritage Foundation		Katharine MacGregor	Deputy Secretary/Deputy Chief of Staff
<a href="#">11/9/2017</a>	Heritage Foundation	Thomas Spoehr	David Bernhardt, James Cason, Downey Magallanes, Scott Cameron, Todd Wilens	Various
<a href="#">11/27/2017</a>	Americans for Tax Reform	Grover Norquist	David Bernhardt	Interior Secretary/Deputy Secretary

<u>Date/Link</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Contact/Topic</u>	<u>Interior Official</u>	<u>Title</u>
<u>11/30/2017</u>	Texas Public Policy Foundation	Energy & climate summit	Doug Domenech	Assistant Secretary, Insular and International Affairs
<u>4/5/2018</u>	Urban Revitalization Coalition	Darrell Scott, Kareem Lanier	Daniel Jorjani, Timothy Murphy, Mariagrazia Caminiti, Edward McDonnell	Various
<u>5/10/2018</u>	Competitive Enterprise Institute	Myron Ebell	Doug Domenech	Assistant Secretary, Insular and International Affairs
<u>5/22/2018</u>	Competitive Enterprise Institute	Myron Ebell	David Bernhardt	Interior Secretary/Deputy Secretary
<u>7/18/2018</u>	Competitive Enterprise Institute	Myron Ebell	David Bernhardt	Interior Secretary/Deputy Secretary
<u>7/25/2018</u>	Mountain States Legal Foundation	Cristen Wohlgemuth	David Bernhardt	Interior Secretary/Deputy Secretary
<u>12/6/2018</u>	Cato Institute		Doug Domenech	Assistant Secretary, Insular and International Affairs
<u>3/7/2019</u>	Property and Environment Research Center		David Bernhardt	Interior Secretary/Deputy Secretary
<u>4/30/2019</u>	Cato Institute		Doug Domenech	Assistant Secretary, Insular and International Affairs
<u>5/4/2019</u>	Competitive Enterprise Institute	Myron Ebell	Doug Domenech	Assistant Secretary, Insular and International Affairs

The following biographies are of current and former senior Interior Department officials with connections to right-wing think tanks, conservative advocacy groups and other land privatization interests.

## The Players: Trump Interior Officials Connected to Right-Wing Think Tanks and Right-Wing Land Privatization Advocates

### KATHLEEN BENEDETTO

A geologist by training, Kathleen Benedetto has worked for Trump's Interior Department in the secretary's office and as a [senior adviser](#) at the Bureau of Land Management. Benedetto has longstanding ties to the Wise Use movement's leaders. Early in her career, she worked as a geologist for mining interests in Oregon, Colorado, Oklahoma and Nevada, according to her [resume](#), which was obtained and posted online by ProPublica. In 1993, Benedetto [co-founded](#) the [Women's Mining Coalition](#), a group that lobbies congressional offices on mining issues. She and two other female geologists organized an [annual mining industry fly-in](#) to meet with policymakers in Washington, D.C.

Benedetto later worked for several industry-friendly think tanks and advocacy groups, including People for the West/People for the USA!, a [now-defunct](#) Wise Use group that pushed for expanded access to public lands on behalf of extractive industries (Benedetto was Montana field coordinator for the group). People for the West was launched by the Western States Public Lands Coalition, which was backed by oil, mining and uranium interests, according to a 1991 story [in The Washington Post](#). The group sought to derail efforts in Congress to scrap an antiquated 1872 law that allows mining firms to extract minerals from public lands without paying royalties. To make their case, the group enlisted miners and their families to protest the potential change at public hearings. "It's a natural thing for management and the workforce to combine their efforts," Bob Reveles, vice president for governmental affairs for the Homestake Mining Co. and a People for the West official, told the Post. By the late 1990s, People for the USA!, had 120 chapters nationwide, but ultimately fell apart due to a decline in membership. "We brought the extremists that were taking over the environmental movement to the attention of the public, and, as a consequence, we were able to influence policy," the group's executive director, Jeff Harris [told High Country News](#) in 2000 as the group was disbanding.



Benedetto [testifying](#) on Capitol Hill in 1995, Source: CSPAN.

From 1995 to 2003, Benedetto was involved in a group called the [Grassroots Endangered Species Act Coalition](#), which was critical of U.S. endangered species protections. In a 1995 newsletter published by the [Alliance for America](#), a Wise Use umbrella group funded by industry groups, Benedetto was quoted as saying that the Endangered Species Act "states that plants, animals and bugs are more important than human beings and that's morally bankrupt." In September 1995, Benedetto [testified in favor of](#) controversial [legislation](#)

by Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska) and former Rep. Richard Pombo (R-Calif.) that would have gutted the Endangered Species Act by [allowing economic considerations](#) to override species protections. In her testimony, Benedetto sought to downplay the impact of extinctions, calling them "part of the natural process" and invoked the dinosaurs to wave away the concerns of endangered species advocates:

**One of my primary concerns is that the law, the 1973 law, did not take into consideration that extinctions are part of the natural process, and if you look at the geologic record you can see throughout time that extinctions have occurred. We are all familiar that the dinosaurs were here for several millions of years and they are not here any longer and they disappeared long before man ever emerged as a species.**

Source: House Resources Committee [transcript](#), September 20, 1995.

Benedetto also worked as a field coordinator for the [industry-backed Montanans for Common Sense Water Laws](#), which advocated against water quality standards that impact wastewater discharged from mines. Then, from 1999 to 2003, Benedetto worked in Washington, D.C. as program director for the [National Wilderness Institute](#), another defunct group that pushed to repeal and [launched numerous attacks](#) on the Endangered Species Act. Benedetto then worked for 13 years on Capitol Hill as an aide to Republicans on the House Natural Resources Committee, before leaving to become a consultant for an environmental remediation firm, [Bioxy Research](#).

After Trump's election, Benedetto was part of the incoming Trump [transition team](#) focusing on Interior Department issues. She remained at Interior as part of an initial "[landing team](#)" of political appointees staffing the Interior Department in the Trump administration's early days. While working at the Interior Department, initially as a special assistant to former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, Benedetto held numerous meetings with [mining and energy interests](#) such as representatives of the [Twin Metals mining project](#) in Minnesota, which is fiercely opposed by environmentalists. Benedetto's former colleagues in the anti-environmental movement have been welcome as well: An entry on Benedetto's calendar from [March 2017](#) shows a meeting with Interior lawyer Daniel Jorjani (see profile below) and unnamed "property rights groups."



Source: [Calendar](#) for Kathleen Benedetto.

## KAREN BUDD-FALEN

In October 2018, Karen Budd-Falen was [named](#) the Interior Department's deputy solicitor for fish, wildlife and parks. A native of Big Piney, Wyo., and a longtime critic of federal land management policies, Budd-Falen is a fifth-generation rancher who went to law school intending to represent the livestock industry. "All my life I watched the federal agencies push these guys around," [she told Newsweek](#) in 1991.

A fierce critic of the Endangered Species Act, Budd-Falen has numerous connections to Wise Use groups and their leaders. In 2011 testimony, Budd-Falen [claimed](#) that the Endangered Species Act is "used as a sword to tear down the American economy, drive up food, energy and housing costs and wear down and take out rural communities and counties." In a 2016 speech, Budd-Falen [said that](#) "Right now, I would repeal the ESA in a heartbeat but they tell me that Congress will never do that in a bazillion years. Heck, we

can't even get them to offer a bill to amend a little teeny piece of it, so I guess we'll never get rid of it." Budd-Falen worked for three years in the Reagan administration's Interior Department. She then was a lawyer for the conservative Mountain States Legal Foundation in Denver and started her own law firm, the [Budd-Falen Law Offices](#), with her husband, Frank Falen.

As a lawyer, Budd-Falen [specialized](#) in representing ranchers as well as local governments in property [disputes](#) with the federal government. She [represented](#) a group of Nevada ranchers including the notorious anti-government rancher Cliven Bundy in [a case about endangered species protections for tortoises](#) on land used for grazing. Bundy and supporters engaged in an armed [standoff](#) with federal officials after failing to pay fees for having his cattle graze on public lands, which Bundy denied were controlled by the federal government. Budd-Falen has seemed sympathetic to Bundy's cause.



Budd-Falen speaking in 2019. Source: [Western Values Project](#).

"The Cliven Bundy situation goes to show how American citizens react when a government has so expanded that it believes that the citizens are subservient to political power," Budd-Falen [told](#) the Daily Caller in 2014. "In this case, the federal government claims that it had to remove grazing to protect a species — when in reality, livestock grazing has a minuscule impact (not even a bad impact) on the species." But Budd-Falen also said she did not endorse Bundy's decision to stop paying fees to the government, [telling a ranchers' news outlet](#), "I was not around or part of the decision when Cliven quit paying his grazing fees. I think that is breaking the law."

Budd-Falen has advocated for the ["county rights" or "county supremacy"](#) movement, which argues that local or state law supersedes federal laws. "She has spent her career fighting against the very existence of U.S. public lands, filing frivolous lawsuits against the BLM, working to subvert public land managers, supporting unpopular efforts to dispose of public lands, and even aligning herself with fringe extremists," [wrote](#) Greg Zimmerman of the Center for Western Priorities in 2017. A land-use plan [drafted](#) with Budd-Falen's assistance for a county in New Mexico claimed that "federal and state agents threaten the life, liberty, and happiness of the people" and "present a clear and present danger to the land and livelihood of every man, woman, and child."

In Budd-Falen's most well-known case, she [represented Wyoming rancher Harvey Frank Robbins](#), who refused to grant the federal government an easement across a portion of his property and claimed that the government was violating his rights. Robbins sued individual Bureau of Land Management employees under federal [racketeering](#) law, a claim that was [rejected](#) by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case [Wilkie v Robbins](#).

Budd-Falen was a member of the Trump [transition team](#) for Interior and was [considered](#) to lead the Bureau of Land Management, an idea that terrified environmentalists. “This is probably one of the worst picks he could possibly come up with to head the BLM,” the Sierra Club’s Athan Manuel [told Salon](#) in 2017. Budd-Falen said she was [unwilling](#) to sell off her family ranch as ethics lawyers demanded. The request to sell that ranch “was a ridiculous bridge too far,” she [told E&E News](#).

Budd-Falen and her husband [own thousands of acres of land](#) that are habitat for large populations of sage-grouse, a threatened species of birds prevalent in oil-rich states. Budd-Falen’s [calendars](#), disclosed by the Western Values Project, outline meetings with representatives of energy industry trade groups pushing to roll back sage grouse conservation efforts and prioritize energy production. In March 2019, the Trump administration fulfilled a key wish of oil companies by [rolling back protections](#) for the birds, but a court then [invalidated](#) hundreds of oil and gas leases, saying the administration did not properly protect sage grouse habitat. The bird, which is known for its [mating dance](#), also inhabits Wyoming land [owned](#) by RuPaul and Kanye West.

## SUSAN COMBS

The Texas politician Susan Combs, [a longtime opponent of endangered species protections](#), was the Interior Department’s assistant secretary for policy, management and

budget until she [left the federal government](#) in spring 2020. Combs [worked](#) as an unconfirmed appointee at Interior after her nomination announcement, tasked with reorganizing the department. Combs was [confirmed](#) to the post in June 2019, after her controversial [nomination](#) stalled for more than a year. A former state lawmaker, Combs was elected the Texas agriculture commissioner in 1998 and also served two terms as the state’s comptroller. In 2015, Combs was [named](#) a visiting senior fellow at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative think tank that receives [funding](#) from Koch Industries and many other companies and wealthy individuals, many of whom made their fortunes in the energy industry. “From state’s rights to property rights, Texas must continue to be a model for the nation,” Combs [said](#) in a press release at the time.



Source: [Department of Interior](#).

Conservation and environmental groups wrote in a letter opposing Combs’ Interior Department nomination that she “built her career favoring big corporations and special interests over the needs and survival of imperiled species.” As comptroller for the state of Texas, Combs convinced state lawmakers to give the comptroller’s office control of endangered species policy and [fought efforts](#) to add new species to the federal endangered species list. In a 2013 public forum, Combs referred to “incoming SCUD missiles known as [endangered species] listings.” An [investigation](#) by Global Witness found that Combs’ ranch near the Mexico border earned her between \$267,000 and \$2.1 million in income from leases issued to six oil companies.

In 2009, Combs was [quoted in the Wall Street Journal](#) downplaying the potential impact of clean energy. “I don't know where the new jobs are going to come from,” she said. “They're not going to come from wind.” Ten years later, the Houston Chronicle [reported](#) that renewable energy was the state’s fastest-growing job category.

## LANDON TUCKER DAVIS

Former Interior Department official Landon Tucker Davis is a Republican operative who was Trump’s campaign field manager in West Virginia. Davis worked as regional director of Americans for Prosperity in Virginia, as an aide on Republican campaigns, and as outreach director for a pro-coal group [Faces of Coal](#).

<b>Landon Tucker Davis</b>	<b>Page 2</b>	<b>(b) (6)</b>
<b>Faces of Coal/Count on Coal Outreach Director</b>		June 2012- April 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinated issue advocacy, earned media, event management, and coalition building.</li> <li>• Represented organization at various trade shows and conferences.</li> <li>• Worked to plan, organize and implement special events ranging from 2,000- 8,000 attendees.</li> <li>• Maintained relationships with legislators, staff members, civic groups and business leaders.</li> <li>• Coordinated volunteer operations for community events.</li> <li>• Compiled data for funder reports, press packets and directed letters to the editor campaigns.</li> </ul>		

Davis worked at a pro-coal group, according to his [resume](#)

Davis, who was hired in the Interior Department as a policy adviser on mining issues, drew scrutiny in 2019 after The Washington Post [revealed](#) that Davis and other several Trump administration officials worked to stop the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from [protecting](#) two species of crayfish from water pollution from coal mining. Davis explained the Interior Department’s decision to cancel a study of coal mining’s health effects on residents by [saying](#), “Science was a Democrat thing,” the Post reported. After leaving the Trump administration, Davis became [executive director of a new conservative group](#), Virginia Rising Action. Politico [described](#) the group as the state arm of the Republican political research group, America Rising.

## DOUG DOMENECH

The Interior Department's assistant secretary for insular and international affairs, Doug Domenech has worked at a variety of industry groups and as a staffer for Republican officials. Most recently, Domenech was director of the Texas Public Policy Foundation's "fueling freedom" project, which [launched](#) in 2015 and aimed to combat the Obama administration's plan to cut climate emissions from power plants. Domenech [said in a](#)



Source: [Department of Interior](#)

[press release](#) that the project would "redefine the public conversation around fossil fuels, and especially their positive role in society." The project aimed to "build a multi-state coalition to push back against the federal Environmental Protection Agency's legal overreach with the Administration's Clean Power Plan."

Previously, Domenech worked for former Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell, a Republican, as the state's natural resources secretary. Upon being named to the job, Domenech was open about his lack of knowledge about the Chesapeake Bay cleanup, a major mid-Atlantic environmental issue. "I'll tell you right off that I don't know too much about the Bay," he said in a 2010 [interview](#). Domenech [worked in the Interior](#)

[Department](#) under President George W. Bush as White House liaison, deputy chief of staff, and acting deputy assistant secretary for insular areas. Before that, he was executive director of the National Center for Home Education and worked for 11 years at the Forest Resources Association, a trade group for the logging industry.

Domenech has been reprimanded twice by the Interior Department's inspector general. In December 2019, the inspector general [found](#) that two meetings between Domenech and the Texas Public Policy Foundation violated federal ethics regulations barring federal employees from working on issues involving a former employer for one year. In May 2020, it found that Domenech broke ethics rules again, by using his official email trying to get a job for his son-in-law at the Environmental Protection Agency. Democrats have [called for Domenech's removal](#).

## ROBERT GORDON

Another fierce critic of the Endangered Species Act, Robert Gordon was [hired](#) by former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke as a deputy assistant secretary for policy, management and budget. He is now an [adviser](#) to the U.S. Geological Survey. Among its many functions, the USGS provides scientific expertise about wildlife habitats to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which uses that information in making [assessments](#) of whether to list species under the Endangered Species Act. The Trump administration has been working to [undermine](#) this conservation law, which has saved species including gray wolves, bald eagles, grizzly bears and orcas from extinction. Corporate interests including housing developers and energy companies have long complained about endangered species

regulation, and the Trump administration has moved to [weaken](#) how the government implements the 1973 law.

Both Gordon and Benedetto testified at a 1995 congressional hearing and were critical of the Endangered Species Act. Gordon [called for radical reforms](#), describing the law as “failed outdated law that needs to be replaced with one that works” and a “punitive regulatory scheme [that] pits people against animals.”

From 1989 to 2004, Gordon was executive director of the National Wilderness Institute, which worked to challenge endangered species protections. In a 1997 [press release](#), Gordon said that the federal endangered species protection program “could be likened to a doctor who has committed innumerable misdiagnoses, is quick to elect radical surgery and has never saved a patient.” The group had former Republican lawmakers Dick Armey and Larry Craig on its board and called itself a “[voice of reason on the environment](#),” claiming that “the solutions to our environmental problems lie in responsible stewardship, not in social uprising, needlessly scaring consumers, throwing small businessmen into jail, protecting roaches, exposing people to life-threatening diseases, or driving them into oblivion.” In a 2002 Washington Post [story](#), Jon Marvel of the Western Watersheds Project called the National Wilderness Institute “a green-scam group,” and the Sierra Club’s Jim Dougherty said, “The general rap is, they’re a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

Gordon also [worked](#) as a Republican aide on the House Natural Resources Committee, followed by the conservative Heritage Foundation and the [Competitive Enterprise Institute](#). In a 2013 panel discussion on the concept of “free-market environmentalism” Gordon touted a Heritage philosophical [treatise](#) spelling out “Eight Principles of the American Conservation Ethic” that argued against regulations, claiming that, “We must work to decouple conservation policies from regulation or government ownership. In the aggregate, markets—not mandates—most accurately reflect what people value, and therefore choose, for their environment.” At the panel, Gordon [sought to contrast](#) environmental protections with constraints on personal freedom, saying, “The most successful environmental policies emanate from liberty. We choose liberty and there is a statistically demonstrable positive correlation between the quality of our environment and freedom.”

In a 2018 [report](#) for the Heritage Foundation, Gordon called the Endangered Species Act “so ineffective that taxpayer dollars are used to fabricate successes — and many species now listed should be removed from the list as mistakes or extinct.” In an analysis for the Competitive Enterprise Institute, Gordon [wrote](#) that “the ultimate price of the program easily reaches up into the tens and more likely hundreds of billions of dollars,” and claimed that the act’s “demonstrably poor record in recovering species suggests we are not getting much for all that.” Shortly before joining the Trump administration in 2018, Gordon was [quoted in a press release](#) deriding environmental advocates as “the green

swamp,” saying, “We are encouraged that Secretary Zinke has begun the process of addressing some of these flaws with new regulations. As the green swamp is sure to oppose substantial reforms, advocates of fixing things will have to vigorously engage in the rule-making process.”

## DANIEL JORJANI

A longtime ally of Charles and David Koch, Daniel Jorjani was [confirmed](#) as the Interior Department’s solicitor in September 2019 after a bruising confirmation battle. During his



confirmation hearings, Democrats [accused Jorjani of lying to Congress](#) about a [policy](#) allowing political appointees to examine public records requests and withhold documents. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) [said the public records](#) policy “sure looks like an effort to conceal the fact that Trump Interior officials are spending their days doing the bidding of special interests like oil and gas giants.” An inspector general’s report [concluded](#) that Interior officials [delayed the release of public records](#) about Bernhardt until months after he was confirmed. Wyden and Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-N.M.) have [called for](#) a criminal investigation into whether Jorjani committed perjury in his public testimony about the Interior Department’s document review process.

Source: Video of Capitol Hill hearing [posted](#) on YouTube by the Western Values Project.

Jorjani was previously the Interior Department’s principal deputy solicitor, [authoring legal opinions](#) on behalf of the Trump administration including the elimination of protections for national monuments and the [rollback of protections for migratory birds](#). He also [renewed expired leases](#) for the controversial Twin Metals copper and nickel mine in Minnesota, reversing an Obama administration decision.

Before joining the Trump administration, Jorjani was a key staffer for the Kochs, working for five years as general counsel of the Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce, a once-[secretive](#) conservative group [described](#) in 2013 by Politico as “The Koch brothers’ secret bank” for funding conservative causes. Before that, Jorjani worked for two years for the Charles Koch Foundation and Charles Koch Institute. He also served as an Interior Department aide in the George W. Bush administration.

According to [an e-mail obtained](#) by the Western Values Project through a public records request, Jorjani reached out to top Koch aide Brian Hooks in April 2017, inquiring about whether Koch network members were interested in joining the National Park Foundation’s board. HuffPost [reported](#) that this email contradicted Jorjani’s prior statement under oath at his confirmation hearing, in which he said that he had had no contact with Koch interests.

## GARY LAWKOWSKI

A former legal aide to Republican members of the Federal Election Commission, Lawkowski [worked as legal counsel](#) to the Kochs' Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce for nearly two years before joining Trump's Interior Department. Lawkowski



Source: [Federalist Society](#).

has worked in several roles, including counselor to the solicitor, counselor to the deputy secretary, deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management and counselor to the secretary. Lawkowski also worked in the White House as a senior domestic policy advisor.

In a 2019 meeting with a Colorado business and government group, Lawkowski [spoke](#) about the Interior Department's deregulatory agenda. In 2018, Lawkowski [spoke](#) in a Federalist Society podcast about the Trump administration's plans [to radically scale back punishment](#) for accidental bird deaths, an effort backed by industry groups. Lawkowski said saying that the Obama administration's interpretation of a federal bird-protection law "hangs the Sword of Damocles over a host of otherwise lawful and productive activities."

## STEPHEN LECHNER

In April 2020, Stephen Lechner was [appointed](#) to [deputy chief administrative judge](#) of the Interior Department's land appeals division. In this job, Lechner hears appeals of federal decisions on issues including grazing, mining, oil and gas leases, and Native American issues. Lechner formerly was chief legal officer of the Mountain States Legal Foundation. The appointment of Lechner and conservative operative Christopher Prandoni as administrative law judges drew concern from environmental advocates worried about the appointment of more ideological political officials rather than more impartial career employees who traditionally have filled those jobs. "It serves a really important role for a body that is supposed to be a board of appeals, similar to a court system," Nada Culver, vice president of public lands and senior policy counsel for the National Audubon Society [told E&E News](#). "It's a quasi-judicial body. It should be treated that way." In an earlier interview with E&E News Lechner [defended](#) the Bureau of Land Management's hiring of his former Mountain States boss, William Perry Pendley, saying "I don't think Perry is fringe, I think he follows the rule of law."

## LORI MASHBURN



Source: [LinkedIn](#).

The Interior Department's White House liaison Lori Mashburn is a former Trump campaign official who previously worked for the Heritage Foundation handling coalition relations, [according to her LinkedIn profile](#). She was one of more than 50 Heritage staff picked for the Trump administration, according to a [tally](#) compiled by Heritage. Mashburn was one of six Trump appointees at the Interior Department [investigated](#) for possible ethical misconduct after HuffPost [reported](#) on two instances of Mashburn attending private events sponsored by Heritage. In a [complaint](#) to the Interior Department's inspector general, the Campaign Legal Center said the events violated Mashburn's pledge to recuse herself from issues involving her former employer. The inspector general, in a [report](#) that appeared to match Mashburn's case, found no violation of ethics rules.

## BRANDON MIDDLETON

Since November 2017, Brandon Middleton has been [deputy solicitor for water resources](#) at the Interior Department. He has spent much of his career working to promote agribusiness interests and derail endangered species protections.



Source: [LinkedIn](#).

After graduating from law school, Middleton joined the conservative Pacific Legal Foundation in Sacramento, Calif, according to his LinkedIn [profile](#). He worked on issues involving California water rights and endangered species issues and has repeatedly criticized endangered species protections. In 2009, Middleton [wrote](#) there is "something inherently wrong about the Endangered Species Act — the public still favors protection of endangered species, yet is turned off about the uncompromising nature of the ESA. Whether it's the ESA's failure to incentivize endangered species protection, it's lack of respect for private property rights, or it's shoddy record at

actually rehabilitating species, skepticism towards overzealous enforcement of the ESA is well-justified."

Middleton represented large California agribusiness operations in a lawsuit [arguing](#) that the government violated the Constitution by protecting the Delta Smelt, a small fish that lives in river water sought by California agribusiness interests for irrigation. In a 2011 blog post, Middleton [mocked](#) "the greenies" for [rejoicing](#) over a Supreme Court decision not to review a lower court decision rejecting the Pacific Legal Foundation's lawsuit.

In another endangered species case, Middleton [represented property owners](#) in a lawsuit attempting to remove a type of beetle unique to California's Central Valley from the

endangered species list. Middleton argued that the beetle should not take precedence over economic growth. “In the midst of a deep recession, we should be facilitating economic development, not stifling it with unjustified restrictions on land use and job creation,” said Middleton [in 2010](#).

Middleton briefly worked at the law firm Harrison, Temblador, Hungerford and Johnson, then was hired by former Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) as senior counsel on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. He then became a legislative assistant for former Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) Before starting at Interior, Middleton worked for several months at the U.S. Department of Justice. According to reporting by Mother Jones and the Project on Government Oversight, Middleton [was the liaison](#) between Sessions’ office and lawyers working to [undermine](#) a [major environmental cleanup project](#) in an African-American neighborhood in north Birmingham, Ala.

## WILLIAM PERRY PENDLEY

One of the key figures in the anti-environmental movement, William Perry Pendley was the longtime president of the conservative Mountain States Legal Foundation in Lakewood, Colo., where he worked as president and chief legal officer for 30 years.



Source: [Department of Interior](#).

A Reagan administration alumnus and a climate change [denier](#) who uses the Twitter handle @Sagebrush\_Rebel, Pendley has been [running](#) the Bureau of Land Management since July 2019 under an arrangement that allows him to “temporarily” exercise the authority of the director. The agency has lacked a Senate-confirmed director for the entire Trump administration. Environmental [groups](#) and [Montana Gov. Steve Bullock](#) have filed lawsuits to challenge the legality of Pendley’s appointment, and his authority [remains unclear](#). Pendley’s 17-page [recusal list](#) sets out more than 50 trade groups, municipalities, counties, individuals and businesses, including farming, mining and

energy concerns, that make up Pendley’s former clients, employers and other financial interests.

Pendley has long sought to sell off federal lands. As an Interior Department official during the Reagan administration, Pendley wanted to [sell all BLM-managed lands](#) east of the Mississippi River, according to a handwritten to-do list uncovered by E&E News.



Source: Reagan administration memos [archived](#) by the University of Wyoming.

Pendley wrote in a 2016 National Review [essay](#) that the Founding Fathers “intended all lands owned by the federal government to be sold” because jurisdiction over property law was given to the states, an argument that mainstream legal scholars [generally regard as outlandish](#). At the start of the Trump administration, Pendley even [criticized](#) Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke for not doing enough to reduce the size of national monuments, accusing Zinke of going “rogue” like a “rookie agent in a spy thriller.”

Pendley has also expressed sympathy for extremist points of view. In a [2014 piece](#) in the National Review, Pendley even expressed sympathy for the views of Cliven Bundy, saying that many westerners “were not surprised by the rancher uprising” claiming there was an “overreaction by federal officials” and accusing the Obama administration of an “eager, early, and extended embrace of policies anathema to the American West.” In a 2017 speech to conservative activists, Pendley joked about killing endangered species. “Out west we say ‘shoot, shovel and shut up’ when it comes to the discovery of endangered species on your property,” [according](#) to a recording obtained by The Guardian.

After joining the Trump administration, however, Pendley distanced the Interior Department from his personal views, [writing](#) that the Trump administration “is crystal clear in its opposition to any wholesale disposal or transfer of federal lands” and that “my assertion that the founders intended the sale of all federally-owned lands was not prescriptive but a historically-accurate observation relevant to the debate.” Speaking to a conference of environmental journalists, [Pendley said](#), “My personal opinions are irrelevant,” and “I have a new job now. I’m a zealous advocate for my client. My client is the American people and my bosses are the president of the United States and Secretary Bernhardt. What I thought, what I wrote, what I did in the past is irrelevant. I have orders, I have laws to obey, and I intend to do that.” Under Trump, the BLM has moved its headquarters, including its [top officials](#), to Grand Junction, Colo. in the [same office building](#) as oil and gas companies.

Even after joining the Trump administration, Pendley appeared sympathetic to the theory that county officials have supremacy over the federal government, [writing that](#) “counties are a governmental-arm of sovereign states. Maintaining that deference is essential to making BLM a truly productive and valued partner to Western communities.” In response, the Western Watersheds Project’s Eric Molvar [called those remarks](#) “a dog whistle” to public lands opponents.

Pendley has longstanding ties to many anti-environmental members of the Trump administration, as evidenced by a fall 1995 quarterly [newsletter](#) listing Pendley, Benedetto and Gordon as attending the eighth annual Wise Use Leadership Conference in Nevada. At the conference, Pendley presented the “Activist of the Year” award to Benedetto, now his colleague at the Interior Department, for her work on behalf of the mining industry. Gordon was the featured luncheon speaker, and Pendley “roused the audience with his optimistic assessment of our chances in the courts.”

# The Private Sector

## The Wise Use Memo

Volume 8, No.3      Private Property—Free Markets—Limited Government      Autumn, 1995

THIS  
ISSUE

Page 2

Defending  
Dwight  
Hammond’s  
Rights

Page 3

What Do We  
Believe?

The Wise Use

Governing:

## Leadership Conference Report: What a Success!

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**I**f we saw anything at the 1995 **Wise Use Leadership Conference** in Reno, it was enthusiasm! More than 150 delegates from all over the nation attended the 8th annual event, aimed at “Fixing the Endangered Species Act.”

Emcee **Kathleen Marquardt** of Putting People First said, “This was the best, most intensive conference ever.” **Rob Gordon** of the Washington, D.C.-based National Wilderness Institute was the featured luncheon speaker, and challenged wise use leaders to rise to the opportunities presented by the new Republican-dominated Congress.

**Perry Pendley**, President of Mountain States Legal Foundation roused the audience with his optimistic assessment of our chances in the courts. He made the presentation of the conference’s Activist of the Year Award to **Kathleen Benedetto** of the Womens Mining Coalition. Congratulations, Kathy!

**Jim Burling** of Pacific Legal Foundation gave a sobering overview of the case law that has evolved around the ESA.

Our agenda has become the national agenda, **Rep. Helen Chenoweth** (R-Idaho) told wise use leaders in her keynote address. A member of the House Resources Committee’s ESA Task Force, **Rep. Chenoweth** has heard testimony all over the nation. She gave a detailed assessment of fixing the ESA’s problems.

**Chuck Cushman**, head of the American Land Rights Association and **Kathleen Marquardt** gave the well-received workshop, “Peaceful and Fun Ways to Influence Public Policy.” Chuck once again proved his legendary ability to poke fun at our opponents while making a strong point to the public.

The Center thanks all the wise use leaders who spoke and the dozens of organizations that co-sponsored this hugely successful event!

Source: Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise quarterly [newsletter](#), Autumn 1995, posted [online](#) by Greenpeace.

In his voluminous writings, Pendley frequently has made insensitive statements about marginalized groups. Pendley wrote that “[illegal immigration is spreading like a cancer.](#)” In a 2017 Washington Examiner column, Pendley [wrote](#) that the Black Lives Matter movement was built on a “terrible lie.” In 2018, Pendley tweeted about “Islam’s war with America” and [cited](#) the anti-Muslim writer Robert Spencer, whom the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) calls “one of America’s most prolific and vociferous anti-Muslim

28

propagandists.” In 2019, Pendley [insinuated](#) that a police shooting by a Somali-American police officer was the result of “diversity and race-based decision making.”

## WILLIAM PERRY PENDLEY’S EXTREME VIEWS

### On Public Lands

*“The Founding Fathers intended all lands owned by the federal government to be sold. After all, jurisdiction over real property, that is, property law, was given to the states.”* – [National Review](#), January 2016.

### On Environmentalism

*“You can’t understand the battle against fossil fuels without understanding what is at the core of the environmental movement and these environmental extremists. They don’t believe in human beings. They’re not concerned about human health and well being.”* – [March 2014 speech](#), Conservative Political Action Conference.

### On Climate Change

*“69 degrees and sunny today. Sky is falling tomorrow. #ClimateChangersReal NOT!”* – [Twitter post](#), April 2019.

### On Diversity

*“How many have died and how many more will die because of diversity and race-based decision making?”* – [Twitter post](#), April 2019.

### On Immigration

*“Illegal immigration is spreading like a cancer... It is outrageous that the Mexican government is dumping millions of people on our soil, while Congress and the White House twiddle their thumbs.”* – 2007 fundraising [letter](#) for Mountain States Legal Foundation.

### On Indigenous People

*“The history of the federal government’s treatment of American Indians has not involved overt, intentional racial hatred, but instead an attempt to achieve a Jeffersonian ideal of a United States of America in which all adopted the English language, Christian religion, and Anglo/American culture and lived side by side.”* – “War for the West” by William Perry Pendley, as [quoted](#) in [The Intercept](#).

Pendley has objected to educational materials focusing on gender and transgender issues, [calling such a curriculum](#) “propaganda by activists with a radical political agenda” who aim “to escape oversight by parents and to inculcate children with their views” and called upon the readers of his column “to prevent this brainwashing program from coming to the schools of our children and grandchildren.”

Much of Pendley’s Twitter feed is devoted to the mockery of female politicians, especially those of color. He described Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as a “[petulant kid](#).” He mocked the [speech](#) and [personal life](#) of Rep. Ilhan Omar, a Somali immigrant. He mocked

## WILLIAM PERRY PENDLEY'S EXTREME VIEWS

### On Black Lives Matter

*"Michael Brown never raised his hands in surrender and cried, 'Hands up; Don't shoot.' We know the political movement spawned August 9, 2014, Black Lives Matter, was built on that terrible lie — a lie the mainstream media perpetrated, that cowardly politicians, fearful of saying "all lives matter," emboldened, a lie that spread like cancer through inner cities endangering men and women in blue and the citizens who look to them for protection."*

-[Washington Examiner](#), 2017.

### On Covid-19

*"We're making accommodations [to employees] simply because of the Wuhan virus and anything we have to do in response to that."*

-[The Daily Sentinel](#) (Grand Junction, Colo), June 2020 (referring to move of Bureau of Land Management to Colorado)

### On Transgender Rights

*"Men who identify as women should not compete against women. It's unfair, foolish, and wrong."*

- [Twitter](#), February 2019

### On Rep. Ilhan Omar's Support for Medicare for All and Criticism of Big Pharma

*"Like so much that comes out of her mouth that is not anti-American or anti-Semitic, this is stupid -- [Twitter](#), June 2019*

Sen. Kamala Harris's 2019 comments about childhood school busing, [writing](#), "There was a little boy in Cheyenne, Wyoming who was bused to five different elementary schools. That little boy was me. I got over it [@KamalaHarris](#) you should too."

Native Americans have been [frequent targets](#) for Pendley and often have been subjects for his [mockery](#). He has called Native American religious views "[pantheism](#)" and "[paganism](#)." Pendley even mocked the spiritual practices of Indigenous groups in 2009 by [complaining](#) about "American Indian religious practitioners and their increasing insistence that federal land and private property be off-limits to use because it is 'holy' to them."

Pendley's anti-Indigenous views call into question his ability to execute a key mission of his agency: the duty to consult with tribes. As the BLM [says on its website](#), "Federally recognized Indian tribes are sovereign nations exercising government-to-government relations with the United States... the essential reason for Native American consultation is to identify the cultural values, the religious beliefs, the traditional practices, and the legal rights of Native American people, which could be affected by BLM actions on public lands."

As documented [by The Intercept](#), Pendley has repeatedly targeted tribal [voting rights](#) and the jurisdiction of [tribal courts](#) and their tax-exempt status and has worked to deny protections for tribes' sacred sites. Under Pendley, Mountain States engaged in a lengthy legal battle against a Native American tribe over the process for electing county commissioners in Fremont County, Wyo. Mountain States represented the county at no cost, fighting a court order to provide representation to a local tribe by creating a county commission district centered on an Indian reservation. Patricia Bergie of the Eastern Shoshone Tribal Council [said that Mountain States](#) was trying "to make sure that our voice isn't heard, and trying to make sure that we don't have any weight in the county," according to a 2010 story by the Associated Press. In a 2006 book entitled "Warriors for the West," Pendley claimed that "recognized tribes may soon be little more than associations of financial convenience" [and asserted](#) that "The history of the federal government's treatment of American Indians has not involved overt, intentional racial hatred, but instead an attempt to achieve a Jeffersonian ideal of a United States of America in which all adopted the English language, Christian religion, and Anglo/American culture and lived side by side."

While at Interior during the Reagan Administration, Pendley was an enthusiastic proponent of maximum resource exploitation, [consistently advocating](#) for drilling and mining interests in the west. One key priority for the Reagan Interior Department was a huge increase in Wyoming and Montana coal leasing, according to a May 1981 [memo](#) by Pendley. "Our objective should be to lease more than enough coal to allow the states, industry, and the market place to function freely," he wrote at the time.

Our objective should be to lease more than enough coal to allow the states, industry, and the market place to function freely. "Excess" leasing neither degrades the environment nor creates community impacts. The deliberate or unconcious constraint on the market by withholding Federal coal-and especially low cost coal - can have serious economic consequences.

Source: May 1981 [memo](#) by William Perry Pendley, published by E&E News

Pendley's advocacy of coal industry interests stirred controversy. A 1983 federal [review](#) by the General Accounting Office (now the Government Accountability Office) found that the government sold off Wyoming and Montana coal leases for \$67 million, or \$100 million less than GAO's estimates of their market value. That sale sparked several examinations of the close [contacts](#) between Pendley and another Interior Department official and a coal company, leading to the revelation that Pendley, another Interior Department official and their wives [attended](#) a dinner with two coal company attorneys. The coal companies paid for the entire bill of nearly \$500, or more than \$1,340 adjusted for inflation. The chairman

of a federal commission on coal leasing [concluded](#) the Interior Department “had acted unwisely and had made significant decisions involving many millions of taxpayers' dollars with significant impact on the environment without adequate documentation.”

## CHRISTOPHER PRANDONI

In April 2020, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt named Christopher Prandoni, a former White House and Interior Department staffer to be an administrative law judge in the



Source: [LinkedIn](#).

Interior Department. The appointment of Prandoni, who graduated from law school in 2017, immediately raised eyebrows. “He has been a licensed attorney for less than two years. That is not the kind of person I would think you would expect to find being appointed to an administrative law judge position,” said Stephen Bloch, legal director of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance in an [interview](#) with E&E News.

According to Prandoni’s [LinkedIn profile](#), he worked for nearly six years at Americans for Tax Reform, the conservative anti-tax think tank founded by Grover Norquist, which has promoted climate denialism and received [funding](#) from corporate interest groups tied to the Kochs. In a 2010 blog post,

Prandoni described concerns about the Kochs’ influence “[leftist paranoia](#),” concluding that “it seems that there is no political cause that cannot be tainted by the hint of financial or ideological association with the Kochs, however tenuous it may be. The thinking among liberal pundits seems to be that popular conservative initiatives are rendered illegitimate if one can conjure up an image of the Koch brothers stroking Persian cats and using their evil corporate funds to buy the allegiance of the duped masses.”

In a 2011 op-ed titled “[Obama’s War on Domestic Oil Production](#),” Prandoni blasted the Obama administration for not doing enough to ramp up offshore oil drilling in the wake of the 2010 BP oil disaster, accusing the White House of taking an “anti-energy, anti-jobs position.” Prandoni [then worked as a legislative assistant](#) for Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), a leading opponent of public lands, before being hired at the White House Council on Environmental Quality. He then worked as a top Interior Department aide before being named an administrative law judge in April 2020.

## HUBBEL RELAT

The Interior Department's deputy solicitor for general law, Hubbel Relat has been a political operative for a variety of conservative pro-industry and anti-government groups.



Source: [LinkedIn](#).

According to Relat's LinkedIn [profile](#) and financial disclosure [form](#), Relat worked in 2009 and 2010 for the Koch-founded Americans for Prosperity, where he coordinated the group's efforts to oppose Obamacare, helping to increase public disapproval of the health care program. After that, Relat worked as a political consultant, working on [a controversial ad attacking](#) Obama's stimulus spending and using a dark vision of future Chinese hegemony to promote austerity policies in the U.S. He worked as general counsel for the Kochs' [political data-mining firm](#), i360, as a senior strategist for another Koch group, Freedom Partners, and as vice president of state policy and general counsel at the American Energy Alliance, working on an effort to oppose the Obama administration's climate plan for power plants. Before joining the Trump administration, Relat worked as director of external relations for [Fueling U.S. Forward](#), a now-defunct Koch-funded pro-fossil fuel [effort](#) targeting minority voters.

Like Jorjani, Relat has been subject to intense scrutiny over allegations that he exerted influence over the Interior Department's responses to public records requests. An inspector general's report [concluded](#) in [August](#) 2020 that Interior officials [temporarily withheld public records](#) about Bernhardt until months after he was confirmed. Relat told investigators that "sensitive information that we're not legally obligated to disclose, we should treat more strategically in terms of when and how . . . it's disclosed." Relat also [acknowledged](#) that in instances where a court had ordered the Interior Department to produce documents, "we should do so in a way that prioritizes documents that take into account the need to strategically release that information."

## BRIAN STEED

A former Republican aide on Capitol Hill, Brian Steed [worked](#) as the Bureau of Land



Source: [Utah State University](#).

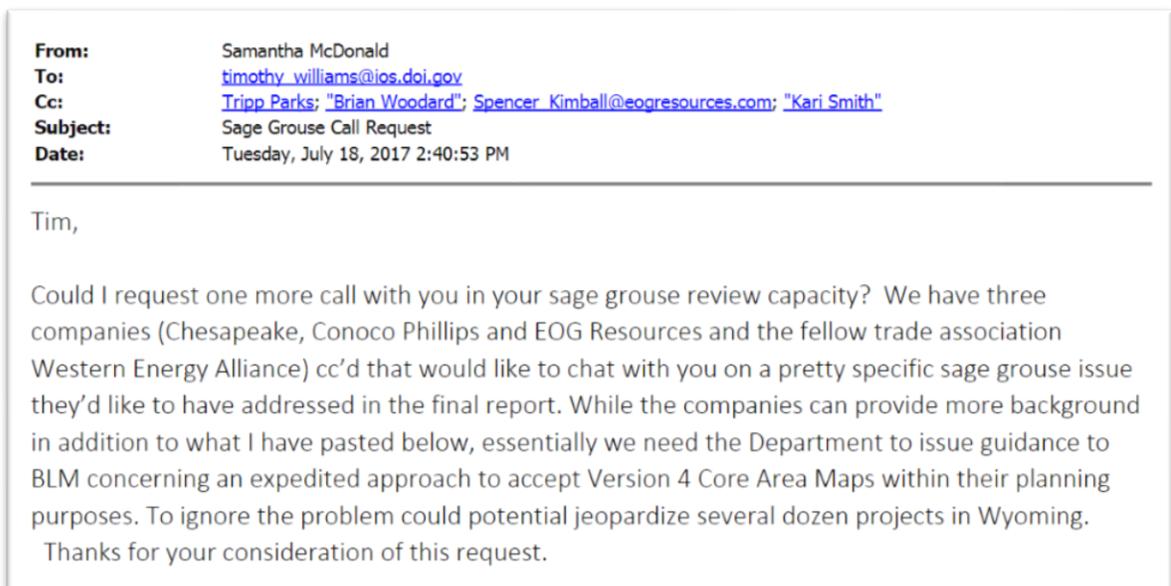
Management's director of programs and policy before leaving the Trump administration. He previously was chief of staff for Rep. Chris Stewart (R.-Utah), a leading advocate for transferring federal lands to local ownership who was [named one of 15 top public lands enemies](#) in Congress by the Center for Biological Diversity, sponsoring bills to give states more power over livestock grazing. In 2015 Stewart, with Rep. Rob Bishop (R-Utah), co-founded the [Federal Lands Action Group](#), a congressional caucus pushing for land transfer. In a 2016 speech alongside Stewart and other land-transfer advocates, [Steed said](#), "We have these federal overlords... How do we have them be a little more responsive to the needs that we have?"

We know there's a variety of things that could be done, one of which is seeking large-scale transfer." Steed also [detailed](#) other potential options to give ranchers better access to public lands, saying that, "There are a variety of things that we could do, to I think make our situation better, even if we don't get the lands transferred tomorrow." Steed then left the federal government to become executive director of the [Utah Department of Natural Resources](#).

## TIMOTHY WILLIAMS

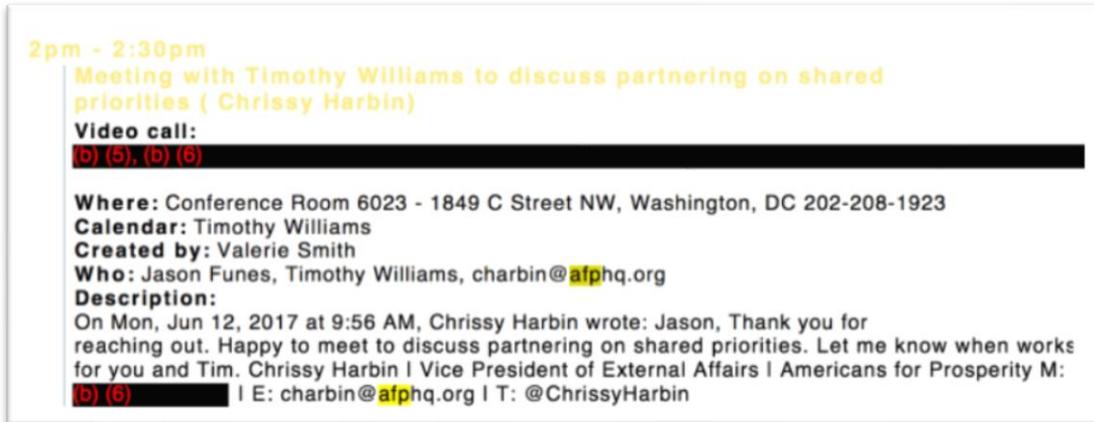
The former deputy Nevada state director of Trump's presidential campaign, Timothy Williams is [principal deputy director of intergovernmental and external affairs](#) at the Interior Department and a longtime Nevada [conservative political operative](#) who was the Nevada field director of Americans for Prosperity and managed several political campaigns. He also worked as a real estate agent and started his career in a carpenter's union.

At the Interior Department, Williams has served as a key point of contact for [industry groups](#) looking to expand oil and gas exploration. His efforts to smooth the path for oil companies seeking favorable policies were detailed in a [New York Times investigative story](#). E-mails obtained by the Western Valuest Project show Samantha McDonald, a former [lobbyist](#) for the Independent Petroleum Producers of America, an energy industry trade group, e-mailing with Williams about an issue involving sage grouse protections that could "jeopardize several dozen projects in Wyoming."



Source: [Emails](#) obtained by the Western Values Project.

Williams was the subject of an [ethics complaint](#) by the Campaign Legal Center, which found that he failed to disclose his former position with Americans for Prosperity on a federal financial disclosure form. The ethics complaint also requested a review of whether a video call with an Americans for Prosperity official violated an ethics pledge. The meeting was designed “to discuss partnering on shared priorities,” according to a calendar item [disclosed by journalist Jimmy Tobias](#) in Pacific Standard.



Source: [Calendars](#) obtained by Documented Investigations.

## TODD WYNN

A former official at the Koch-backed American Legislative Exchange Council, Todd Wynn was the director of intergovernmental and external affairs at the Interior Department. He left the federal government in fall 2019 and is now a senior government affairs representative at the utility company Arizona Public Service, according to his [LinkedIn profile](#).



Source: [LinkedIn](#).

Wynn started his career as program director for climate and energy policy at the Cascade Policy Institute, a conservative think tank in Oregon. In that job, he appeared in and co-produced a climate denial [video](#) called “Climate Chains” that featured numerous climate deniers. Wynn claims in the video that “climate change is a perfect scapegoat for environmentalists. They can use that to change the behavior, the lifestyle, and the standard of living of every single citizen on the planet.” He continued, saying: “We also have to look at the benefits of higher global temperatures, a lot of places that weren’t arable land before are now going to be.... I think that global warming could be a net benefit for the planet in fact.”

In 2010, Wynn [claimed](#), “the science is far from settled and that global warming is not the crisis it was once made out to be.” Wynn then became director of the energy, environment and agriculture tax force at ALEC, where he published articles [that attacked Obama-era efforts to curb climate change](#), [endorsed transferring public lands to states](#) and [slammed states’ renewable energy mandates](#). After ALEC, Wynn spent four years at the Edison Electric Institute, the utility industry lobbying group. While at the Interior Department, Wynn met with Richard Lindsey, head of energy and environment for the bipartisan and [industry-friendly](#) Council of State Governments, where Wynn had previously served as a committee member. The Campaign Legal Center, in its ethics [complaint](#) against several Interior Department officials, requested an investigation into whether this meeting was an ethics violation.

## CONCLUSION

President Trump consistently has brought into government officials who seek to undermine the agencies they are chosen to lead. But even in the corporate-friendly Trump administration, the Interior Department stands out for its fealty to extractive industries such as mining and energy companies. The Trump administration has stacked the Interior Department with anti-government extremists and climate change deniers who embody the desire to do the bidding of dirty energy corporations. During the pandemic, Trump’s Interior Department has taken [preferential treatment](#) of oil and gas executives to a new level, engaging in numerous [bailouts and other special favors](#) for the energy industry. Our nation, and the future of our public lands, deserve better.



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