

# Public lands messaging guidance after Trump victory

Now that news outlets have announced Donald Trump is the president-elect, here are key points to keep in mind:

- America's national parks, monuments, wildlife refuges, and other public lands are [universally popular](#), regardless of political party. They represent America's natural heritage and are the backbone of an outdoor recreation economy that generates [more than \\$1 trillion in economic output](#) every year.
- Any attempts to sell off public lands, open protected lands to destruction, or prioritize oil, gas, and corporate profits will be met by swift and overwhelming opposition from the American people.
- President Trump's first term was an [unmitigated disaster](#) for America's public lands. Tribal nations and communities of color suffered disproportionate harm from Trump's environmental policies.
- In Project 2025, former Trump officials spelled out [exactly what they intend to do](#) in a second term: prioritize even more lands for oil and gas drilling and remove critical protections on landscapes across the country.
- Trump will take office as the state of Utah is trying to [seize control of national public lands](#), backed by extremist lawmakers and Republican attorneys general across the country. The lawsuit, although [legally baseless](#), poses an existential threat to America's lands with Trump in the White House.
- Who Trump appoints will say everything about how he will govern. Fossil fuel executives, land sell-off proponents, and science deniers have no place managing public lands, Tribal relationships, and wildlife policy. We will hold Trump and his administration accountable every step of the way.

## Lowlights from Trump's first term

- President Trump ended his first term as [the most anti-nature president](#) in American history. He attempted to remove protections from nearly 35 million acres of public lands.
- Trump's Interior department was run by the oil and gas and mining industries, which had unfettered access to leasing and drilling. Recreation, hunting, conservation, and endangered species protection [always came last](#).
- Trump's unprecedented attack on national monuments and the Antiquities Act was [wildly unpopular across party lines](#). His attempt to shrink two national monuments in Utah was reversed by President Biden, but the underlying legal question of presidential authority to shrink monuments has yet to be fully resolved by the courts.
- Trump's Interior Department was a hotbed for corruption and personal favors, using government authority to advance personal interests. Trump's first Interior secretary, Ryan Zinke, was forced out after meeting with the chairman of Halliburton to discuss investing in Zinke's dreams of [opening a brewpub](#). His second Interior secretary, "swamp creature" David Bernhardt, was

[caught interfering with agency decisions](#) in order to benefit a Trump donor and [interfered with requests](#) under the Freedom of Information Act.

- Trump's Bureau of Land Management head, William Perry Pendley, [served illegally](#) and [eviscerated leadership and knowledge](#) at the BLM, leading Trump's systematic attacks on the scientists and civil servants who protect and manage America's parks, wildlife, and natural resources.

## How Biden reversed the damage

- The Biden administration strengthened rules to protect public lands and civil servants, and if Trump tries to weaken those protections without following proper procedure, he will lose in court.
- Although David Bernhardt portrayed himself as a careful technocrat and lawyer, his illegal actions were [repeatedly overturned by the courts](#) and not supported by the Biden Justice department. However, with dozens of Trump-appointed judges now on the bench, the courts could be much more deferential to a second Trump administration.
- The Inflation Reduction Act overhauled the oil and gas leasing system to help ensure American taxpayers receive a fair share from the sale of publicly-owned resources, and those reforms were strengthened by the BLM's Oil and Gas Rule. Overturning that and dozens of other Biden-era rules would take years and would be hard to legally justify.

## Trump's second term plans

- Trump is likely to follow [Project 2025 guidance](#) that calls for the downsizing of landscape-scale national monuments. This could result in the elimination of over almost 12 million acres of public land protections. Project 2025 also recommends a future administration work to repeal the Antiquities Act, a tool that gives presidents the power to designate national monuments and has protected dozens of iconic American landscapes from the Grand Canyon to Glacier Bay.
- Project 2025 calls for the removal of almost all environmental and climate change mitigation policies that apply to oil and gas extraction, as well as immediately restarting coal leasing in Wyoming and Montana.
- Project 2025 recommends opening up untouched Alaska wilderness, including the Tongass National Forest, for drilling, mining, and logging, exacerbating climate change and putting wildlife at risk.
- Trump is likely to follow Project 2025 recommendations for the removal of Endangered Species Act protections from iconic Western species like grizzly bears and gray wolves, and puts the greater sage-grouse at risk of extinction.
- Trump is likely to answer calls from Western lawmakers to sell off public lands for housing and commercial development with no affordability or density guardrails, harming ecosystems and wildlife, reducing recreation opportunities, and increasing sprawl in the West, while failing to address housing affordability issues.

## Tough questions

- **Trump signed GAOA, which made the Land & Water Conservation Fund permanent... so he can't be all bad, right?** Trump only supported the Great American Outdoors Act because two vulnerable GOP senators needed to greenwash themselves in an election year. Every budget Trump proposed would have eliminated LWCF funding for land protection. His flip-flop on LWCF in his final year was welcome, but he'd never repeat it. Project 2025 calls for Trump to give local and state governments the power to block LWCF purchases of private lands from willing sellers.
- **Was it really that bad last time?** Yes. The courts stopped some of Bernhardt and Trump's most extreme anti-conservation actions, but the policies they did put in place set American conservation and climate mitigation efforts back by a generation. This time around they will be more brazen, knowing they have a conservative supermajority at the Supreme Court that's willing to ignore decades of case law.
- **What about gas prices?** Oil and gas companies are already sitting on decades worth of leases on public lands while enjoying record profits. Expanding drilling in the Arctic and offering up more lands and waters for future drilling will only delay the energy transition and further increase the costs of climate change—more wildfires, flooding, and deadly heat waves.
- **What about the adults in the room during the first Trump term, like John Kelly?** They've all left and [warned America](#) about the dangers of a second Trump term. There's already a list of [banned staffers](#). Former Interior Secretary David Bernhardt is the chair of the "Center for American Freedom" at the America First Policy Institute, which is advising the Trump transition team and wants to [end all civil service protections](#).