

THE CONSERVATION STAKES OF PRESIDENT TRUMP'S "DAY ONE" EXECUTIVE ORDERS

COMPILED BY
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Overview

In the name of “Energy Dominance,” President Trump took a number of actions on his first day in office that target public lands for potential drilling, mining and logging, threatening conservation progress and worsening the climate crisis.

It is important to note that while these executive orders concern many Wilderness Society priorities, the vast majority do not directly enact policy changes that affect public lands. Instead, the orders direct federal agencies to take steps that could lead to specific threats. The full impacts of these orders will continue to ripple throughout these agencies over the days and weeks to come—in fact they have only begun to be formally published in the Federal Register over a week later.

In short, while President Trump may have signed a laundry list that paints targets on our public lands, his officials will still need to carry those out according to the law. Many of these actions—especially those that seek to roll back previously issued decisions and policies—will be challenging for the Trump administration to carry out. We will need to be diligent in deploying a range of advocacy strategies to combat these efforts. Over the coming weeks and months, we will engage to defend our public lands and climate from these threats and will call on our members and supporters to join us.

The stakes of these executive orders include:

1. Taking us backwards on conservation and climate goals

Early in his presidency, President Biden made commitments to tackle the climate and extinction crises and increase equitable access to nature. One of the first orders of business for President Trump was revoking those commitments. Among the few actions that have immediate (if symbolic) effect, President Trump [rescinded executive orders](#) that established the goals of ensuring equitable benefits from climate and conservation investments (Justice40) and conserving 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030 (30x30). Trump also backed away from nationwide climate and clean energy commitments, including withdrawing from the international Paris climate accords. These actions make clear that the Trump administration intends to ignore these goals and steer us sharply in the wrong direction.

2. Threatening special places

President Trump’s executive orders on “[Unleashing American Energy](#)” and “[Unleashing Alaska’s Extraordinary Resource Potential](#)”—signed after he bragged about the goal to “drill, baby drill”—put a target directly on many of the special places that The Wilderness Society and local communities have fought for decades to protect.

Targeting national monuments and mineral withdrawals

In recent years we've seen President Biden, Interior Secretary Haaland and other officials take action to follow through on locally driven efforts and protect many of our nation's most special cultural and natural resources from the threat of unchecked mining and drilling.

Unfortunately, President Trump's executive orders foreshadow looming threats to many of these places. In the name of expanding mining, Section 9 of the executive order on Unleashing American Energy directs the secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to reassess any public lands withdrawals for potential revision.

Given what President Trump has said on the campaign trail and his past actions, this could mean renewed threats to the [Boundary Waters](#) in Minnesota, as well as [Chaco Canyon](#) in New Mexico, the [Thompson Divide](#) in Colorado and many other landscapes.

National monuments are also threatened. In President Trump's first term, he attempted the largest rollback of public land protections in history, slashing Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments by 85% and 50%, respectively. The Wilderness Society and our partners are preparing for possible attempts by President Trump to once again push through unpopular rollbacks of national monument protections. Such actions would run counter to the Antiquities Act, which for over 100 years has granted presidents the broad authority to designate national monuments—but not revoke them.

As we prepare for those potential attacks, some in Congress are also advancing [attacks on core conservation laws](#), like the Antiquities Act, proposed in a recent bill introduced by U.S. Representatives Mark Amodei (NV) and Celeste Maloy (UT). This effort is aligned with a broader scheme to [sell-off public lands and otherwise](#), open-up and give away our country's public lands, monuments and parks to corporate polluters.

Attacking Alaska's wild places

Underscoring the Trump administration's focus on drilling, mining and development in Alaska's wildlands above all else, President Trump also signed a separate executive order on "Unleashing Alaska's Tremendous Resource Potential." This incredibly detailed executive order outlines a raft of actions targeting some of Alaska's most special places that The Wilderness Society has fought for decades to [protect](#). The following attacks on Alaska's wild places will also be colored by the policy direction in the "energy dominance" orders described further below. We don't yet know exactly when or how the Trump Administration will start trying to remove the protections highlighted below, but you can rest assured that The Wilderness Society is ready for the fight.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

At 19.3 million acres, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is America's largest wildlife refuge and provides habitat for caribou, polar bear and migrating birds from across the globe. The more than 200,000-strong Porcupine caribou herd uses the refuge's coastal plain as its annual calving grounds, and the Gwich'in people have relied on the caribou to sustain them since time immemorial. The area has also long been targeted for oil development, including through the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which opened the coastal plain to leasing and drilling.

The Biden administration finalized a plan for the congressionally mandated oil and gas leasing program that included science-based protections for the refuge's irreplaceable and sensitive natural and cultural resources.

After two congressionally mandated lease sales failed – with the [most recent one drawing not a single bid](#) – President Trump's executive order directs a series of actions aimed at removing critical protections for the refuge and fast-tracking oil leasing and drilling. This includes an order to reinstate leases issued in the final days of the first Trump administration that were later cancelled due to legal deficiencies; rolling back science-based restrictions on development; holding additional lease sales; and handing out permits for damaging exploration and drilling activities on the sensitive tundra.

The Western Arctic

The [Western Arctic's National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska](#) (or "the Reserve") is the nation's largest tract of public land at 23 million acres (nearly the size of Indiana). The Reserve hosts some of the best migratory bird habitat in the country, with millions of birds from every continent on Earth hatching and raising their young there. The Reserve's massive size also supports tens of thousands of caribou, along with wolves, wolverines, musk oxen and grizzly and polar bears.

The Biden administration took several actions to increase protections for the Reserve:

- First, the Biden administration reverted management of this incredible region from the first Trump administration's oil-dominant "Integrated Activity Plan" to a balanced approach that ensured roughly half of the Reserve would be off limits to oil and gas leasing; closed areas critical to wildlife, conservation and North Slope communities' ways of life; and revived special protections for ecologically rich areas. In 2024, the [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) issued a new final management rule for the Reserve](#). The regulations brought new protections, including adding safeguards to the more than 13 million acres designated as "Special Areas." The rule established a process for creating or expanding these Special Areas—an important step forward in protecting biodiversity, communities and the global climate.

- Following the management rulemaking, the Biden administration initiated a Special Areas process to determine whether, under the law, additional areas of the Reserve should enjoy stronger protections based on their significant resource values. After receiving more than 100,000 comments during a three-month comment period, [BLM issued a report and guidance](#) based on the best available science recognizing subsistence hunting and gathering by North Slope communities as a significant value in Special Areas across the Reserve; recommended Special Area protections for roughly an additional three million acres; and put in place interim protection measures for those areas while the Special Areas process was completed.
- President Trump's recent executive order directs the Department of the Interior to sacrifice all this vital progress and these essential protections for the Western Arctic on the altar of oil drilling. It requires the Department to rescind the protective management rule, withdraw any protective guidance for Special Areas and revert management of the Reserve to the first Trump administration's oil-dominant plan at the expense of all else.

Tongass National Forest

There aren't words to convey the majesty of the Tongass. At almost 17 million acres spread across southeast Alaska, the Tongass is the nation's largest national forest. Sometimes called "America's Amazon," this unique and wild place contains the largest tracts of old-growth forests left in the United States and contains nearly one-third of the old-growth temperate rainforest remaining in the world. Many of these ancient trees are over 500 years old, 6 feet in diameter and over 150 feet tall.

The Roadless Rule is a policy that protects roadless forests on U.S. Forest system lands across the country. In the Tongass, this protects 9.3 million acres of breathtaking, undeveloped roadless land, including millions of acres of massive, majestic old-growth forest, from logging and roadbuilding.

Trump eliminated these protections his first time in office after a long, controversial, high-profile fight. Thankfully, President Biden restored protections at the request of many Tribes, local communities and businesses, conservation organizations and grassroots activists like yourself. But mere hours after taking office for the second time, Trump directed his administration to once again eliminate protections and open the forest to logging.

Other threats to Alaska's wildlands

In addition to unleashing fossil fuel development across Arctic Alaska and logging across the Tongass, the executive order threatens other wild landscapes and science-based conservation progress. For instance, it orders approvals for the damaging 200-mile Ambler Road across Gates of the Arctic National Park to facilitate a mining district; fast-tracks a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge; rolls back tribally led conservation protections

in the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan; and revokes protections against development for 28 million acres under a provision of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

3. Cutting out public input and ignoring key science

Underscoring how the Trump administration intends to move forward an energy dominance agenda that is neither popular nor supported by science or community benefits, the actions also direct changes to how the federal government regulates and carries out analyses of projects under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). [NEPA is a foundational environmental law](#) that requires agencies to consider the environmental impacts of their actions and involve the public in their decision-making processes.

The executive order on “Unleashing American Energy” strips the Council on Environmental Quality (the body entrusted with developing regulations that ensure an inclusive, informed, and consistent federal decision-making process) of its rulemaking authority and calls for unraveling the important NEPA rules that CEQ finalized last spring. Among other things, the discarded rules clarify agency obligations to study the climate and environmental justice impacts of their actions; meaningfully involve the public early in the decision-making process; and ground agency decisions in science, including Indigenous Knowledge. The executive order’s direction that agencies prioritize efficiency and certainty over all else in service of “energy dominance” contravenes the fundamental purpose of NEPA, which is to promote the health and wellbeing of people and the environment.

More specifically, the “Unleashing American Energy” order:

- Initiates a process to rescind the Council on Environmental Quality’s NEPA regulations and replace them with a patchwork of regulations adopted by executive branch agencies. Directs the agencies to write regulations that “expedite permitting approvals” and prioritize efficiency and certainty in the environmental review process. For projects deemed “essential for the Nation’s economy or national security,” the executive order directs agencies to use all possible authorities, including emergency authorities, to expedite federal permits.
- Directs White House staff to prepare recommendations for Congress to facilitate permitting of pipelines and other energy infrastructure projects, and to limit judicial review of the application of NEPA.

While the Trump administration’s NEPA actions may attempt to tilt the scales towards fossil energy and development, these actions cannot erase the law itself as informed by decades of judicial interpretation. The Wilderness Society intends to continue to utilize NEPA to ensure impacts to our wildlands, communities and climate are considered when evaluating projects.

4. Fueling the climate crisis and prioritizing fossil fuels above all other energy sources

President Trump's executive orders aim to prop up polluting fossil fuel companies at the expense of public lands, community health and climate concerns. Not only do the executive orders focus on targeting special places that communities and Tribes have worked for decades to protect, but they prioritize opening more lands and waters to as much drilling and mining as possible. These executive orders also direct agencies to make it as easy and cheap as possible for the fossil fuel industry to develop on our public lands, while disadvantaging the renewable energy development that we know is key to tackling the climate crisis.

Past [reports by the Wilderness Society](#) have found that fossil fuel development on public lands accounts for lifecycle emissions equal to approximately 20% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. The Biden administration's [conservation and climate decisions had begun to make real progress in addressing this](#), with policy actions in the first three years on track for a nearly 40% reduction in emissions from BLM-managed oil, gas and coal on public lands. With the impacts of the climate crisis already visible before our eyes, including on our public lands, we cannot afford to be going backwards. The Wilderness Society intends to continue to fight to make public lands part of the climate solution.

The executive orders signed by President Trump take public lands climate action backwards in the following ways:

Misusing emergency authorities to boost the fossil fuel industry

Congress has endowed the president with authority to declare a national emergency. But this extraordinary power is intended to address true emergencies—such as the COVID-19 pandemic—not to be wielded simply to fulfill a president's preferred policy initiatives. Sadly, on his first day in office, President Trump invoked this power to declare a national energy emergency merely to support drilling for oil and gas at all costs. All this, while U.S. oil and gas production is at record highs, and oil executives [aren't necessarily eager](#) to drill at [a faster pace](#).

This energy emergency declaration is about paying favors to the fossil fuel industry. The executive order clearly defines "energy" in a way that excludes the clean, renewable sources of wind and solar, undercutting the claim that we are facing an all-hands-on-deck energy emergency. The declaration unlocks myriad powers to allow the president to address the claimed emergency more efficiently. President Trump's declaration directs agencies to use any emergency authorities available to boost domestic energy resources—primarily oil, gas and coal—including on federal public lands. That means potentially using the power of eminent domain; forcing companies to extract fossil fuels under the Defense Production Act; and expediting energy projects by, for example, circumventing Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act requirements.

Fortunately, when it comes to oil and gas drilling on federal public lands specifically, the emergency declaration may be more symbolic than substantive. It does not allow the president to bypass long-standing public land laws related to public input and conservation issues when developing fossil fuels on public lands. Nonetheless, it is deeply troubling that the Trump administration is attempting to use emergency authorities in service of a nonexistent emergency to facilitate their energy dominance agenda.

Promoting fossil energy above all else on public lands

On day one, President Trump signed an additional energy-related executive order aimed at “Unleashing American Energy.” Among other directives, it calls for maximizing energy exploration and production on federal public lands and waters, making the U.S. a leader in rare earth minerals and eliminating incentives for electric vehicles. It also directs federal agencies to review all their actions that may burden energy resources, particularly related to fossil fuels. These federal agencies must present action plans to remove burdens to energy resources within 30 days. Once completed, those plans will make clear the full extent of the threats our public lands and communities face.

Among the executive order’s more pernicious actions were to:

- Revoke President Biden’s crucial climate and conservation executive orders
- Demand repeal of significant regulations such as the oil and gas leasing rule that brought common sense to a centuries-old mineral leasing law and the BLM Public Lands Rule that provided long-overdue guidance for how the agency must balance conservation with extractive uses
- Eliminate the newly created American Climate Corps
- Direct the settling of lawsuits brought by industry and other opponents that challenged President Biden’s signature public land rulemakings
- Terminate the government’s use of well-established estimates that calculate the social cost of greenhouse gas emissions
- Require the Environmental Protection Agency to reconsider its power to regulate carbon emissions
- Claw back critical funding mandated by Congress under President Biden’s landmark climate law for climate-smart and job-producing projects benefiting communities across the U.S.

This severely misguided agenda takes direct aim at our climate, the renewable energy resources key to a clean energy transition and the public lands we cherish—all at the expense of communities that depend on a healthy environment and a secure energy future.

Freezing all renewable energy progress on public lands and waters

While claiming the existence of an “energy emergency,” President Trump and his administration took a series of actions in their first week that brought all progress on renewable energy deployment on federal lands and waters to a screeching halt.

Attempting to fulfill his previous promise that “no new windmills” would be built under his watch, President Trump signed a presidential memorandum on the “Temporary Withdrawal of All Areas on the Outer Continental Shelf from Offshore Wind Leasing and Review of the Federal Government’s Leasing and Permitting Practices for Wind Projects.” The memorandum immediately halted all offshore and onshore wind energy development requiring federal approvals.

To accomplish this, the memorandum withdraws all of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) from new or renewed wind energy development and orders the review of all existing wind leases in the OCS to determine whether those leases should be terminated. The withdrawal applies only to wind--not oil and gas, minerals or environmental conservation leasing--and it effectively prohibits all new offshore wind leasing for the indefinite future. Separately, President Trump moved to revoke an order by President Biden that withdrew the OCS in the Pacific, Atlantic and Eastern Gulf from new oil and gas leasing.

The memorandum also orders the immediate cessation of all federal approvals of wind energy development, whether offshore or onshore, pending the completion of a comprehensive assessment of federal wind leasing and permitting processes. President Trump specifically targeted the Lava Ridge Wind Project in Idaho (approved by the Biden administration in December 2024) by ordering a new review of the project and placing a moratorium on all activities and rights-of-way associated with it.

In addition to the wind memorandum, the Department of the Interior quietly issued an order pausing all other actions on all renewable energy types, including solar, for at least 60 days.

To top it off, the definition of “energy” in the executive order “Declaring a National Energy Emergency” omits two major sources of proven clean energy—wind and solar—that together supply a significant and rapidly increasing portion of our overall energy portfolio. And while that order calls for a review of any regulatory burdens on energy resources, wind and solar are conspicuously absent from that directive. The omission of wind and solar is striking given the stated goal of ramping up energy development to address an alleged “emergency,” and it exposes these actions for what they are—a gift to the fossil fuel industry at the expense of the climate, communities and public lands.

Together, these actions ignore the realities of the climate crisis, and the needs of the communities most impacted. The Western U.S. has exceptional renewable energy potential, and some of our nation’s best solar, wind and geothermal resources are found on public lands and waters. Any attempt to stop responsible renewable energy development in the West is an attempt to reverse the potential for thousands of jobs, emission reductions and, ultimately, American energy independence.

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