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## **The Bush Years: A Legacy of Failure for Our Public Lands**

Over the last seven and half years, the Bush Administration has pushed a concerted strategy of reducing the protections for our public lands, parks and forests, and opening up these lands for every type of private, commercial and extractive industry possible.

During the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, I have served as the Chairman of the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee within the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee. Throughout my service in this position, I have conducted oversight and investigatory hearings on many of the Bush Administration's assaults on our natural environment.

In order to shine some sunlight on the Bush environmental legacy, I requested my staff compile a list of some of the more egregious assaults. But, this list only comprises a partial picture of all President Bush has done to harm conservation in America, as it is solely focused on some of the impacts within my area of jurisdiction as Chairman of the Subcommittee. A comprehensive list would also include discussion of the rampant illegal and unethical scandals in the royalty in kind office of the Interior Department where employees partied and enriched themselves at the expense of taxpayers, and the Julie McDonald scandal where a political appointee manipulated science for her own personal benefit and that of the homebuilding and oil and gas industries, or the formation and secret discussions of Vice President Cheney's Energy Task Force, among many, many other examples.

Overall, under Bush, dedicated career employees have been driven out because they refused to comply with unethical activities, science has been manipulated to enrich industry, and environmental laws and regulations have been subverted to push forward damaging activities.

While not highlighted in this report, the Bush Administration has a long-standing practice of releasing proposals that harm our public lands at times when the public is the least likely to notice. For example, on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the Interior Department published a notice that it intends to repeal regulations that give two congressional committees the authority to require the Secretary to temporarily withdraw lands from mining and other threats. The notice was published while Congress was out of session, before the start of a three-day weekend and only gives the public 15 days to comment.

The federal regulation at issue allows the House Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to require the Secretary to withdraw certain lands temporarily in order to give Congress time to consider if permanent protection is warranted and to prevent harm before that occurs. The authority has existed for decades but has been used very rarely: only three times by Congressman Mo Udall in the 1970's and 1980's, and most recently, in the case of the Grand Canyon, where I successfully introduced a resolution in the Committee on Natural Resources to require the Secretary to withdraw certain lands from around the National Park due to the rapid increase in proposals for uranium mining nearby.

The Interior Department, however, has ignored our directive and broken the law that requires them to withdraw the lands, while continuing to allow uranium mining. The Department knows it is legally vulnerable in federal court where it is being sued over this same issue. Instead of simply complying with existing law, the Administration is going so far as to try to do away with the regulation entirely.

This practice is just the latest in Bush Administration attempts to enact by stealth and obfuscation what it cannot accomplish in the light of day. The very way these actions are carried out show that the Administration is well aware that its actions subvert the will of Congress and would not be supported by the American people.”

The enclosed list is merely a small part of the full story of Bush Administration's legacy of failure to our public lands, parks and forests.

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