

Western Values Project



**New Mexico's Outdoor
Heritage Imperiled by Trump
Administration's Culture of
Corruption**

Background

New Mexico is one of the top states for oil drilling on federal lands. The biggest companies taking advantage of this public resource are deeply connected to the Trump administration.

While these sweetheart deals are making the Trump administration's allies very wealthy, they are a bad deal for New Mexico taxpayers and public lands.

New Mexico Oil and Gas Association, the leading such trade organization in the state, has bragged about the massive spike in permissions to drill public resources.

Since the start of the Trump administration, the largest applicants to drill on national public lands in New Mexico were: BOPCO LP (owned by Exxon), COG Operating, Devon Energy, EOG Resources, Marathon, Mewbourne and Occidental Petroleum.

These companies accounted for 906 of the 1,533 Applications for Permits to Drill submitted, per data from the BLM. Altogether 69 permits were issued to these companies during the longest government shutdown in American history.

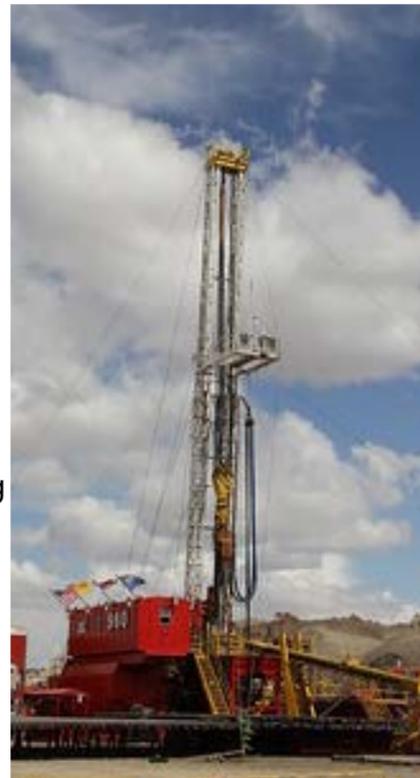
The biggest drillers on New Mexico public lands are deeply connected to Trump

Here are all the ways they've infiltrated the decision-making process about drilling New Mexico public lands at the Trump administration:

Exxon, the owner of BOPCO, and individuals from the company gave over half a million dollars to either the Trump campaign or national Republican party committees over the last two election cycles. Many current DOI staffers worked in various capacities for Exxon before working in government or own stock in the company.

COG Operating is a subsidiary of Concho Resources Inc., which has two current or former staffers working on the inside of DOI: The Deputy Solicitor of Indian Affairs, gave legal advice to the underwriters working on a share equity offering by Concho' and its New Mexico Government Relations advisor is an alternate member of the Royalty Policy Committee.

Devon Energy: Devon gave over \$1 million to various



Republican committees, including the RNC, during the 2018 election cycle alone. In addition, Gabrielle Gerholt, a former top White House staffer on domestic energy and environmental policy previously lobbied for Devon in the private sector, to which he has since returned.

EOG Resources has given at least \$13,000 to President Trump's campaigns since 2016, and many thousands more to various Republican committees, including the RNC. The same Gabrielle Gerholt, who previously worked for Devon and sat on a DOI board, also represented EOG as an attorney at Holland & Hart.

Occidental Petroleum and employees have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Republican Party and Donald Trump. Scott Angelle, the director of the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement in the Department of the Interior received \$2,500 from Occidental Petroleum for his campaign when he ran for Congress.

Marathon Oil has extensive ties to personnel across the Interior Department. Some current or former DOI staff and board members accepted campaign contributions from the company when they were candidates for office. One high-ranking DOI official even owns a lease that Marathon operations, and it pays her rent or royalties for the lease. In 2016 she received between \$50,001 and \$100,000 in income from Marathon. Mewbourne Oil

Curtis Mewbourne, the company's founder, has given hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Republican party. The company currently uses the Interior Secretary's former firm for its lobbying efforts.

New Mexico pays for Trump's coziness with Big Oil

President Trump has identified nearly 1 million protected acres of national monuments for potential elimination. Everything from ancient cultural resources to the air all New Mexicans breathe has been endangered by this rampant corruption and recklessness.

Carlsbad Caverns National Park is under direct threat from the increased drilling pushed by the Trump administration. If drilling near the park goes forward, the caverns' groundwater could be contaminated, and operations could be visible from inside the park.

Chaco Canyon National Historic Park is also at risk. The administration has repeatedly proposed to sell leases near the area, which



is sacred to the native people of the area, and may do so again as soon as next year.

Some of these firms are amongst the worst emitters of methane into the atmosphere since the administration loosened standards to combat the venting and flaring of natural gas.

COG, Occidental, Devon, and BOPCO have accounted for “nearly 40 percent of all spills of crude oil, natural gas and produced water.” [...] “A total of 445 crude oil spills occurred, for a total of 14,021 barrels. Companies also reported 281 natural gas leaks, which accounted for 848 million cubic feet of natural gas, primarily methane. There were also 658 spills of produced water.”

The health effects of those disasters can be as bad as an increased risk of cancer and respiratory disease, particularly amongst vulnerable populations like children and the elderly.

Besides all the critical lands that are targeted for resource exploitation, the

Border corruption

Two construction companies that have donated heavily to the President’s campaign stand to gain from the construction of his controversial border wall, but wildlife and public lands will lose out.

SLSCO stands to make \$20 million from the contracts it has been awarded to build the wall. Its founders gave big to the Republican party during the 2018 election cycle.

Barnard Construction Co. Inc. was awarded a \$187 million contract for border wall work in Yuma, Arizona. Its founder also gave a large amount of money to the Republican party during the last elections.

President Trump’s plan for a border wall and fence along the U.S.-Mexican border threatens the environment in the area. It could “wipe out” the last few jaguars in New Mexico by blocking them from breeding populations south of the border.



Trump administration has proposed disturbing and radical changes to the way some protected public lands would be run. A proposal is still on the table to hand over operations at National Parks and Monuments to special interest private “concessionaires.”

Altogether, New Mexico’s parks and monuments are worth \$1 billion in economic activity. That could be put at risk if protections are lifted, reducing the value of these lands, or if high prices make them more difficult to access.

New Mexico’s leaders must hold the administration accountable

New Mexico’s public lands, as in the West at large, cannot afford any more corruption from the Trump administration. It is time for New Mexico’s elected leaders to stand up to the special interests that have infiltrated the executive branch of government under President Trump. They must flex their oversight muscles and bring the lobbyists and corrupt government officials before official bodies to account for the damage they’ve done to the state’s outdoor heritage.

[To learn more and for full backup for the claims made in this report, click here.](#)