

**Western
Values
Project**



**TRUMP'S
CORRUPTION
IMPACTS
COLORADO'S
PUBLIC LANDS**

Background

President Donald Trump's administration has been fraught with conflicts of interest that have cost the American people dearly. In every corner of the country, politically-connected industries and their allies in his government have hijacked public resources to benefit themselves before the nation.

In the West and Colorado, that has meant public land and water are in the crosshairs of the special interests that have a close relationship with the President's political organization and appointees.

While these sweetheart deals are making President Trump's allies very wealthy, they are a raw deal for Colorado taxpayers and public lands. This report shows some of the worst examples of how the President has put Coloradans' access to public spaces while rewarding his political allies, including:

- Equal access to national parks could be at risk if a Trump plan to privatize them goes forward.
- A coal company received quick approval to mine federal coal after it committed to help the Trump administration build its controversial border wall.
- Oil companies have successfully lobbied Trump's Interior Secretary, a former oil company lobbyist, to open up nearly 2 million acres of critical wildlife habitat to drilling.

Trump wants to sell off access to minerals near a state park along the Colorado River, which includes prized areas for mountain biking, hunting and fishing.



Colorado's land targeted by Trump allies and "energy dominance" strategy

At Trump's direction, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt has dramatically increased coal, oil and gas development on Colorado's public lands, often against the wishes of local governments and advocates for wildlife and open spaces.

None of this is an accident: Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, who has worked for Colorado politicians, has lobbied for more than 10 different oil companies or associations. Likewise, top drillers in the state like are deeply connected to President Trump's administration, political organization and his broader network of allies:

Sandridge Exploration: Paul McKinney, who was recently forced out as CEO of Sandridge Energy, donated heavily to Trump, the Republican Party and its candidates. Marcella Burke, who formerly provided legal advice to Sandridge Energy, held a high-ranking position at the EPA until last year. A subsidiary of the company has also paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to lobby policymakers in Washington.

Chesapeake Energy: Scott Angelle is currently the Director of the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement for the Department of the Interior. Chesapeake donated \$5,000 to him when he ran for the Louisiana Public Service Commission. Over the last two election cycles, the company gave hundreds of thousands to Republican party committees and candidates.

Anschutz Exploration: Laura Keehner Rigas was formerly the communications director for the Department of the Interior, but she previously worked for the American Conservative Union, which was funded in part by Chevron, the Koch brothers, and Phillip Anschutz's foundation.

Altogether, Anschutz has given over \$1.3 million to Republican party committees since 2016.

Chevron: The global oil and gas giant Chevron shares office space with the Bureau of Land Management at its new headquarters in Grand Junction, Colorado. It has donated thousands to Trump administration officials who were formerly candidates for office, and over \$11 million to Republican congressional campaign committees since 2012 alone.

GCC Energy: GCC Energy got unusually quick approval to mine 2,462 acres of federal coal deposits in southwestern Colorado after it promised to support the construction of President Trump's controversial border wall. It employs a lobbying firm with close ties to the Trump family and administration.

Trump corruption hurts Colorado lands

Many of the favors the Trump administration has done for the oil industry have resulted in genuine threats to access to Colorado public lands. As part of its "energy dominance" push, the administration has targeted some of Colorado's most significant land, wildlife, and natural resources.

Interior may approve a mine for a Trump-connected company near Canyon of the Ancients National Monument, only 10 miles from Mesa Verde National Park.



- Colorado has [1.89 million acres](#) of federally managed habitat for the endangered sage-grouse. Trump-connected corporations like Chevron have successfully lobbied former oil lobbyist Interior Secretary Bernhardt to lift protections for those areas and endangered species in general.

- Since the start of the Trump administration, the Bureau of Land Management has opened up 268,364 acres of Colorado public land for drilling according to its calculations.
- Another [440,335 acres](#) of Colorado's national monuments have in the past been at risk of losing their protections through [executive action](#) by the President.

Besides all the critical lands that are targeted for resource exploitation, the Trump administration has proposed disturbing and radical changes to the way some protected public lands are run. A proposal is still on the table to hand over operations at National Parks and Monuments to special interest private "concessionaires."

Altogether, Colorado's parks and monuments are worth nearly half a billion dollars 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.

Colorado's leaders must hold the administration accountable

Colorado's public lands cannot afford any more corruption from the Trump administration. It is time for Colorado'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.