

**Western  
Values  
Project**



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

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 Trump's government have hijacked public resources to benefit themselves before the country.

In the West and in Montana, that experience has meant public land and water are firmly 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 bad deal for Montana taxpayers and public lands. Here are some of the worst examples of how the president has put Montanans' access to public lands while rewarding his political allies.

- **Since the start of the Trump administration, the Bureau of Land Management has opened up 446,777 of Montana public land for drilling according to its own calculations.**
- **Another [377,346](#) acres of Montana's national monuments, have in the past been at risk of losing their protections through [executive action](#) by the President.**

## Montana targeted by Trump's energy, mining strategies

President Trump's Interior department has targeted Montana land for development that is rich in wildlife and wilderness. However, the administration has explicitly stated its goal is to prioritize energy above all other uses, and they've pursued that goal with extreme urgency.



In 2018, the Bureau of Land Management attempted to hand over 223 parcels of Montana public land to big oil companies, but was stalled by the courts because it failed to meet its obligations to determine the impact of the development.

Despite that admonishment, the Trump administration has continued to pursue an aggressive strategy to develop Montana land to benefit some of its closest allies, such as Denbury Onshore, Arch Coal, Hecla Mining and Petro-Hunt.

**Denbury Onshore LLC:** When current Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt was a lobbyist Denbury employed his firm. It has given thousands to Republican candidates, including former Interior Secretary Zinke and President Trump.

**Petro-Hunt:** The owner of Petro Hunt, W. Herbert Hunt, and the company itself, have given tens of thousands of dollars to the Republican party and its candidates, including to President Trump. They won the right to drill over 12,000 acres of Montana public lands in a recent oil and gas lease sale.

**Cloud Peak Energy:** A major coal producer in Montana, Cloud Peak is the biggest benefactor of a Trump administration loophole that allows companies to evade paying full royalties. It has been a major donor to Republican candidates, including former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. Its Vice President of taxation sat on Interior's Royalty Policy Committee.

**Hecla Mining:** The hardrock mining company donated thousands to Republican candidates, including to former Secretary Zinke, who once apologized to the company for having to seek mining permits in Montana. A federal judge ruled the Trump administration "cut corners" in the permission they ultimately issued.

## Montana pays for Trump's corrupt deals with special interests

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

Montana has [millions](#) of habitat for the endangered sage-grouse under federal management, but Trump-connected corporations have successfully lobbied former oil lobbyist Interior Secretary Bernhardt to lift protections for the bird and endangered species in general.

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Besides aiming to directly lift protections, the Trump administration has proposed disturbing and radical changes to the way many 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." Experts [say](#) that could lead to a decline in the quality of services and an increase in

If the Trump administration approves the Hecla mine in northwest Montana, streams could run dry leading to severe loss of endangered bull trout. Countless more acres of other endangered wildlife habitat, particularly for the sage-grouse, are also at risk thanks to the administration's development plans.



public entrance fees.

Montana's national monuments and parks are worth at least \$400 million in overall economic activity, which could be put at risk if these irresponsible Trump administration proposals go forward.

## Montana's leaders must hold the Trump administration accountable

Montana's public lands, as in the West at large, cannot afford any more corruption from the Trump administration. It is time for Montana'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](#).

