Federal public lands are important to our national economy, the economies of mountain towns, and the overall quality of life for citizens in our communities. Yet federal public lands have been under fire in Congress. The Mountain Pact is keeping track of these policy developments to keep you informed. Here are key updates in public lands policy:

**Ryan Zinke Confirmed as Secretary of the Interior**

Yesterday, March 1, fifth-generation Montana native Ryan Zinke was confirmed as Secretary of the Interior in a bipartisan 68–31 vote. Zinke, a self-described sportsman, Teddy Roosevelt fan, and conservative conservationist has repeatedly spoken out in support of federal lands remaining in federal hands, of infrastructure spending to improve National Parks, and of tribal sovereignty. Yet, Zinke has also supported increased natural resource development (i.e. extraction) on public lands. Earlier today, Zinke issued two secretarial orders that will improve access to public lands as well as hunting, fishing, and recreation opportunities nationwide. Now that he has been confirmed, Zinke has the opportunity to defend his words and early actions by choosing to prioritize continued protection and
Valuing Public Lands
On January 3, the first day of the 115th Congress, the House developed and passed a provision, included as part of a larger rules package, that makes it easier for the federal government to sell off public land. The language, authored by Rep. Rob Bishop (R–UT), a long–time proponent of transferring federal lands to states, establishes that the federal government does not have to account for the loss of revenues it receives from public lands. In other words, the U.S. Treasury’s loss in expected cash flow from recreation, grazing leases, oil and gas leases etc. on public lands no longer needs to be considered when evaluating options for the transfer of federal lands to states or private entities.

Shortly after, two similarly controversial bills were introduced by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R–UT). One of the bills, H.R. 621, was withdrawn after an outcry from conservation agencies, the outdoor recreation industry, and countless citizens. This bill would have sold off 3.3 million acres of federal public lands in 10 western states.

Enforcement on Public Lands
The other bill, H.R. 622, is still on the table and aims to rid the BLM and USFS of their law enforcement functions. This would place the responsibility of public lands safety enforcement onto local law enforcement agencies. Many argue this will further increase challenges local agencies face by having to perform essential duties to protect the 440 million acres of public lands the two agencies collectively manage nationwide. This bill was introduced in the House on January 24 and referred to the Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry on February 13 where it is still currently being reviewed.

Outdoor Retailers Speak Up for Public Lands
On February 3, Utah Gov. Gary Herbert signed a bill passed by the Utah State Legislature asking Trump to rescind the protection of the 1.3 million acre Bears Ears National Monument. In response to the continued attack on public lands from the Utah state government, major companies in the outdoor industry, Patagonia and Arc’teryx, announced that they would no longer be attending the Outdoor Retailer trade show that takes place in Salt Lake City, UT twice a year, one of the largest in the outdoor industry. After several other companies chose to withdraw from the trade show, and a conversation with Gov. Herbert that made it clear that his stance on public lands control would not change, Outdoor Retailer announced that they would be leaving the state of Utah after 20 years. This show contributed $45 million to the local Salt Lake City economy every year. Leadership in the states of OR, CO, MT and NM all publicly expressed interest in Outdoor Retailer relocating to their states.

Public Lands Are National Treasures
In support of federal public lands, Rep. Alan Lowenthal (D–CA) introduced a concurrent resolution expressing that America’s Federal public lands are national treasures that belong to all Americans. This resolution is currently being reviewed by the House subcommittee on Federal Lands.

Also of interest/things to watch:

- H.J.Res 46: This bill seeks to repeal the NPS's "9B" rule that places regulations on oil and gas drilling in National Parks (introduced in the House 1/30)
- **Senate voting to repeal BLM methane rule**: This would repeal the newly established Methane waste rule that requires oil and gas companies to use available technologies to capture flared and vented methane

- **H.R. 825**: This bill will promote the development of renewable energy on public lands (introduced in House 2/2)

- **H.R. 520**: This bill would require the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to develop domestic mineral sources that may be important for economic and national security, as well as manufacturing competitiveness (introduced in House 1/13)

- **S. 22**: This bill would prohibit extension and establishment of National Monuments in Nevada without approval of Congress (introduced in Senate 1/4)

- **H.R. 827 and S. 32**: These bills pave the way for increased conservation and recreation on public lands in California (deserts in particular), S. 32 includes provisions for further development of renewable energy (introduced in the House 2/2 and Senate 1/5)

- **H.R. 502**: This bill would permanently authorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (introduced in House 1/12)

Stay tuned for more Mountain Pact policy alerts on federal public lands, climate change and conservation policy.

www.themountainpact.org | info@themountainpact.org