Some outdoor organizations reject Trump's Interior Secretary nomination

His support of oil and gas is one of the main reasons public lands advocates are more than skeptical.

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David Bernhardt has spent most of his career lobbying for oil, gas, and mineral companies.
President Donald Trump has nominated a former oil and gas lobbyist as Secretary of the Interior, which, according to several outdoor advocacy organizations, doesn't bode well for public lands.

Trump appointed David Bernhardt as deputy secretary to Ryan Zinke, and has been running the Interior since the Montanan stepped down last December.

Environmental groups are raising red flags over Bernhardt's leadership of the Interior and based on his background, they aren't drawing conclusions from this air. Firstly, Bernhardt started his career in the 1990s as a lobbyist for oil and chemical companies. He went on to work for the Interior Department in 2001, but Western Values Project claims his time there was riddled with scandal.

After his first stint at the DOI, Bernhardt returned to his former law firm to continue lobbying for mining interests. Former clients include a slew of energy companies—which environmental groups say pose—and have already posed—as conflicts of interest.

"As Interior Deputy Secretary, Mr. Bernhardt has shown a clear pattern of anti-conservation decisions from willfully ignoring science-driven policy to aggressively pushing the administration’s 'energy dominance' agenda and blatantly disregarding the fundamental duties of the National Park Service to ensure our nation’s most precious natural and historic places are protected," said Theresa Pierno, President and CEO for National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). "Mr. Bernhardt has and will likely continue putting private interests above the protection and health of our public lands, wildlife and DOI personnel.

He was also leading the Interior during the historic 35-day government shutdown and instructed parks to remain open to the public despite widespread damage, the NPCA says.
“While Secretary Zinke distracted America with his Teddy Roosevelt ruse, David Bernhardt and his team kept land giveaways to the oil and gas industry moving and the public muzzled from objecting to their polluting agenda," Wilderness Society President Jamie Williams said in a statement. "At the helm of Interior, Bernhardt would further jeopardize our climate and communities across the country with his relentless mission to remove protections for land, water and wildlife. We call on the Senate to reject this nomination.”

Anna Peterson, executive director for The Mountain Pact, added that he "showed his true colors when, during the 35-day government shutdown, the Department of the Interior recalled furloughed employees to only accelerate oil and gas lease approvals, not care for our public lands."

However, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers President and CEO Land Tawney cited Bernhardt's involvement in key actions over the past two years. He is neither in favor or opposed to the nomination. Bernhardt, a Rifle, Colorado, native, is also a hunter and angler.

"We trust that as a public servant bound to uphold Interior’s mission and the responsible management of natural resources, he will utilize the best available science to guide decisions that strike a balance between resource development and conservation," Tawney said in a statement. "Hunters and anglers encourage Mr. Bernhardt to advance proactive policies that elevate considerations for important fish and wildlife habitat, maintain migratory corridor connectivity and enhance public access."

But Trump thinks so too.

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