



Trumping the Wild?

One night last November, Nancy and I tuned into CNN to celebrate the election of the first woman as President of the United States—and for the Democrats to retake the US Senate. But as the evening wore on, I suddenly felt a cosmic shudder, which made me spill much of my second martini. It was as though the wall to a parallel universe had briefly shattered and I had fallen through into a similar but oddly twisted universe. Here, Donald Trump was being elected President and the Republicans were holding onto a narrow majority in the Senate.

As I stumbled into the kitchen to mix Nancy another Bacardi cocktail and me another very dry martini, it became clear that I was not in a *Twilight Zone* episode from my youth but in the here and now of reality.

Donald Trump *was* going to be President of the United States and the Senate would continue to have a Republican majority. I needed that third martini. It wasn't the first election disaster I had faced as a conservationist, however. It was the third. In 1980, Ronald Reagan beat Jimmy Carter; and in 2000, the Supreme Court appointed George W. Bush President over Al Gore, who had won the popular vote and may have won Florida for an Electoral College win as well, had the votes in the Sunshine State been fully and rightly counted. So. If we put aside Trump's strange, chaotic behavior in the Oval Office and his odd, narcissistic personality, and key in on the matters important for conservationists—especially public lands and Endangered Species—we can compare Trump to Reagan and Bush, Jr., and perhaps wash away some of the fear we have all been battered with since Inauguration Day (though I have room only to hit the low spots). ***We have been here before and have come through.***

Reagan

From about 1976 through 1980, public lands grazing permittees, spoiled by being left alone for generations, along with mining and drilling corporations pushed the “Sagebrush Rebellion” to hand over the public lands belonging to all Americans to the states and then disposal to private interests at cut-rate prices. Ronald Reagan, who had had an okay record on conservation as Governor of California, shifted and proclaimed himself a Sagebrush Rebel in the campaign. He showed he was one after being elected.

He appointed James Watt as Secretary of Interior. Watt was a Colorado attorney and head of the smoking-hot anticonservation law firm Mountain States Legal Foundation, which was started and bankrolled by the far-right Coors brothers, owners of Coors Beer. (The Coors boys were that era’s version of the Koch brothers.)

Reagan named Anne Gorsuch, a hard-right Colorado State legislator, as head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and another reactionary Colorado State legislator, Bob Burford, as director of the Bureau of Land Management. Burford was a big rancher with a BLM grazing permit, and hated the agency. Both were also pushed by the Coors. For Assistant Secretary of Agriculture overseeing the United States Forest Service, Reagan picked timber industry lobbyist John Crowell.

Other Reagan conservation appointees followed this line. Watt and Burford did their best to kneecap the BLM’s fledgling Wilderness program and to limit the areas to be studied for Wilderness Area recommendation. Watt further worked to offer oil & gas drilling leases in designated Wilderness Areas, including the flagship Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana. Moreover, as a far-out Christian evangelical, he warned that Jesus would be returning soon and—boy, would he be pissed if we hadn’t used up all the natural resources He and God had given us to use.

Crowell pushed the willing Forest Service brass to boost timber sales—especially in roadless areas and in Ancient Forests. Forest Supervisors and District Rangers who didn’t “get the cut out” had their careers whacked. So bad was Watt that editorial cartoonists had a field day—indeed, Watt became the personification of destroying Nature. The Sierra Club got one million signatures on a petition to fire him and handed it to Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill on the Capitol steps. Earth First! made Watt its honorary membership chair. Donations to and memberships in conservation groups shot up to

unprecedented levels. Republican Senators even became worried about the harm Watt was doing (mostly to their re-election chances). After Watt told a tasteless joke, Reagan found an excuse to fire him.

Anne Gorsuch married her fellow Coloradan, Bob Burford, creating a power couple of the Dark Side. But after she got tangled in a scandal, too complicated to explain here, Reagan accepted Gorsuch-Burford's resignation. Reagan shocked conservationists by appointing William Ruckelshaus, who immediately restored the EPA to its old self. Ruckelshaus was Nixon's first EPA Administrator and one of the great Republican conservationists/environmentalists. (Nixon was the daddy of the EPA, remember.)

Earth First! blockaded timber sales, climbed old-growth trees to keep them from being cut down, occupied uranium mines near the Grand Canyon, and did much more to thwart the mad dash under Reagan to loot the public lands and wildlife. Monkeywrenching spread throughout the country. The Sierra Club and other mainstream groups mobilized and effectively fought the worst of the Forest Service, Interior, and EPA atrocities. Indeed, Reagan ended up signing a passel of Wilderness Area bills, often proposed by Republicans in Congress. Bad things happened on Reagan's watch, but conservationists held the line.



San Juan River, Bears Ears National Monument, © Dave Foreman

Bush/Cheney

Al Gore could have been our best conservation/environmental President, but George W. Bush went the other way. His appointments, though not as colorful as Ronald Reagan's, were as bad in some cases but not so bad in others. The Bush/Cheney Administration started off trying to overturn regulations and rules issued by the Clinton Administration. Indeed, Bush/Cheney's effort to toss the landmark Roadless Area Rule, which was meant to keep National Forest roadless areas from having roads built in them, became a donnybrook in the courts for the whole eight years of Bush/Cheney. Thanks to the dogged work of

conservation groups, however, the Roadless Area Rule was saved. Being oilmen, Bush/Cheney worked to open nearly all federal lands and waters to drilling, pushing especially hard to lease the Arctic Plain portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Again, unyielding conservationists kept the Arctic Refuge undrilled and untracked.

The Bush/Cheney appointments for conservation/environmental positions brought out a rogue's list of the worst the Republican Party had to offer. Among the more outlandish were:

Department of the Interior

Secretary Gale Norton. Former Attorney General for Colorado and before that James Watt's protege at the Mountain States Legal Foundation. Supposedly a libertarian, she was in truth a competent, hard-line attorney for resource-extraction industries and continued in that role as Interior Secretary. When she left, she got a highly paid job with Shell Oil.

Under Secretary Steve Griles. Former lobbyist for the coal and oil industries. Sentenced by a Federal Court to 10 months in prison and a \$30,000 fine for lying to a Senate Committee about his ties to high-rolling lobbyist and notorious crook Jack Abramoff.

Assistant Secretary Julie MacDonald (over the US Fish & Wildlife Service). A civil engineer and Republican activist, she fought against endangered species protections, radically censored reports from FWS scientists, and also handed on internal agency documents to the California Farm Bureau and energy industry lobbyists.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Paul Hoffman (over the National Park Service). Former congressional staffer for Cheney, and then head of Cody, Wyoming, Chamber of Commerce. Pushed for more snowmobiles in Yellowstone NP and for ORVs throughout the Park System.

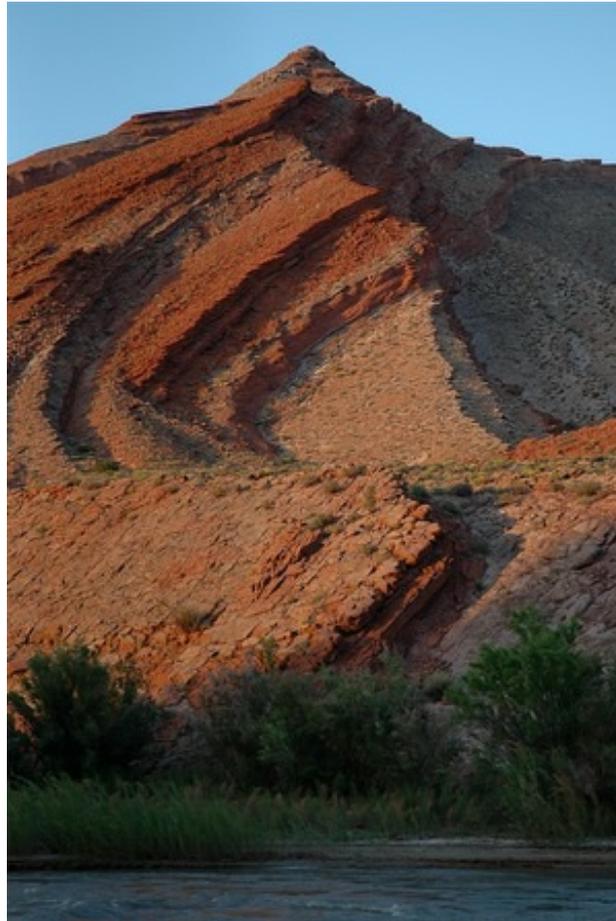
Department of Agriculture

Under Secretary Mark Rey (over the US Forest Service). Former top staffer for Senate Forests Subcommittee and before that vice president of the American Forest and Paper Association. Pushed to overturn Roadless Area Rule and for more logging on National Forests.

Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)

Chair James Connaughton. Former lobbyist for mining companies and the Chemical Manufacturers Association. At CEQ, he backed voluntary industry compliance with environmental laws and regulations.

Chief of Staff Philip A. Cooney. Former “climate team leader” for the American Petroleum Institute. With no scientific training, Cooney radically edited government climate reports to reflect uncertainty over warming and other climate change.



San Juan River, Bears Ears National Monument © Dave Foreman

Trump

In many ways, a new President’s appointees are more important in the day-to-day world of policies and actions than is the President. This is often the case with conservation. So, what do President Trump’s appointees tell us about how conservation will fare in the next four years?

Well, first of all, there aren’t many of them yet.

While the Secretary of the Interior is important, the other Presidential appointees requiring Senate confirmation—such as the under secretary, assistant secretaries, and deputy assistant secretaries—are much more involved in

oversight and direction of key agencies such as the National Park Service. So, until we know who they are going to be, it's tough to parse out how bad the Trump Administration might be on conservation and environmental matters.

Let's look at four nominated so far:

Ryan Zinke, Secretary of the Interior

Okay, Montana Congressman Ryan Zinke would not be my choice for Secretary of the Interior. But given others floated for the job—such as the anticonservation zealot Cathy McMorris Rogers (R-WA) and the entertaining Sarah Palin—Zinke may be the best we could hope for. He hunts and fishes on public lands and is chummy with Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (of which I'm a member).

Despite the lockstep of Congressional Republicans calling for giving federal public lands to the states (for further disposal to privatization), Zinke has flat-out said that he supports federal public lands and is against their disposal. There are real worries on how he will manage our lands and he has not been a friend to Threatened and Endangered species and will likely be strong for state management of wolves and grizzlies (meaning hunting). One of his first actions was despicable — lifting the ban on lead shot and sinkers on National Wildlife Refuges. Conservationists have our job cut out for us—to hold Zinke to keeping public lands federal and to push him constantly on T & E species.

Sonny Perdue, Secretary of Agriculture

Perdue, former governor of Georgia, is a forest landowner and friendly to the timber industry and agribusiness. He did, however, approve the \$100 million Georgia Land Conservation Act. He questions climate change and is likely to encourage the Forest Service to cut more timber. He's likely a bit better than some other potential appointees for the job, but it may well be back to the timber wars for us.

Scott Pruitt, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency

Pruitt, former Attorney General of Oklahoma, who has made a career of suing the EPA, may be the worst choice for EPA Administrator ever—and there have been some damn bad ones. With Trump's outlandish attacks on the EPA, we are likely to see serious, ongoing attempts to gut the agency in every way possible.

Neil Gorsuch, Supreme Court Justice

I put Gorsuch, Trump's pick for the Supreme Court opening, in this list because of his background. His mother is Anne Gorsuch, the first EPA Administrator in

the Reagan Administration. She was forced out in a complex scandal when he was fifteen years old. He was outraged and told her she shouldn't have resigned, that she had done nothing wrong. Given the unfair ruin of her career, in his mind, his decisions on environmental issues could be shaped by that experience.

We will have to wait, though, until the second and third tiers of political appointees in key departments have been made to see how bad the Trump Administration will be. We've dealt with such before under Reagan and Bush/Cheney. Let's not be cowed into thinking that this is the worst we have faced. We've fought the barbarians who have taken over the castle of conservation before, and we can—and must—fight them again. We can do it if we keep our focus on wild things and do not get discouraged.

In summary, remember:

1. Trump's family may be a moderating influence on some of his policies. For example, Donald Trump, Jr., is a life member of the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, one of the most conservation-minded hunting/fishing groups. BHA has a good relationship with Zinke as does Don, Jr. (I'm even a member of BHA.) We can be happy that BHA along with other hunting and fishing groups have taken a leading role in defense of the public lands.
2. During the Reagan and Bush/Cheney administrations, Democrats controlled one or both Houses of Congress. With Trump, Republicans are in control of both houses. This is bad. The failure of Democrats to recapture the Senate, in my mind, is (almost) as bad as losing the Presidency.
3. During the Reagan Administration, there were still Republican members of Congress who were pro-public lands, Wilderness Areas, endangered species, clean air and water, and so on. During Bush/Cheney, such Republican members of Congress were fewer and mostly weaker, but there still were some. Now, we don't have that. Inexplicably to me, Republican congressional members are in lockstep with the Tea Party and extractive industry in backing the great giveaway of public lands to the states or private ownership, and want to abolish the EPA and the Endangered Species Act. This is new, and very, very bad.
4. A big challenge to wilderness lovers during the Trump reign is to keep our focus on defending public lands and endangered species—and not to get sidetracked and lost in the overall progressive opposition to Trump on other issues.

The takeaway is this: We've been here before and have stopped the worst attacks on public lands and wildlife. We can do it again if we keep our focus on wild things and do not get discouraged. I've fought this situation two other times. I'll do it again!

Happy Trails,

Dave Foreman



Dave Foreman on the Thelon River, Nunavit, Canada

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