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## INTERIOR

### Zinke to review agency's climate goals

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A day after standing with President Trump to announce a rollback of Obama-era climate policies, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke took the first steps in reopening federal coal leasing. Photo courtesy of [@SecretaryZinke](#) via Twitter.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has set in motion plans to review and likely rescind dozens of climate change measures.

A secretarial order he issued yesterday on "American Energy Independence" **outlines** how Interior will comply with President Trump's new executive order abolishing Obama-era executive actions to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Zinke's order likely targets Interior's **Climate Change Adaptation Plan** and dozens of other agency planning documents and policies related to climate change.

On a call with reporters yesterday, Zinke demurred when asked about how the agency will now take into consideration greenhouse gas emissions and climate impacts of big projects.

"That's exactly why we're reviewing the policies step by step," he said. "The social cost of not having a job is important too, but we are reviewing what methodology to make sure it's based on sound science."

The order begins the process by advising Interior's agencies that they have 14 days to provide a list of "all department actions they have adopted, or are in the process of developing," that relate to the actions rescinded by Trump's executive action.

"I would not begin to enumerate all of the impacts of this," said Aimee Delach, a senior policy analyst with Defenders of Wildlife. "It's the whole gamut; it's land management, wildfire management, it's facilities and roads, sustainability and putting up solar panels."

For example, per the new White House edict, former President Obama's [E.O. 13653](#), "Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change," is invalidated. The order built on previous efforts by the executive branch to get every federal agency to develop or expand climate change adaptation plans as well as incorporate resilience and climate planning into agency policy.

Interior's 2014 Climate Change Adaptation Plan falls partly under the now-dead order. It spells out specific climate-change-related goals for nine of its agencies. For example, the Fish and Wildlife Service is tasked with increasing support for states and tribes to integrate climate adaptation into conservation planning. One goal of the National Park Service is to create a plan for evaluating climate risk for park facilities and cultural and historical resources.

Not all agency actions may be subject to scrutiny under the new Interior order. Many early-era Obama executive actions on climate change were not quashed under Trump's executive order, including a 2009 order that kicked off climate change action across federal agencies. This could mean some climate change planning documents or policies may be outside this secretarial order's scope, experts said.

When asked specifically if Interior's Climate Change Adaptation Plan would be subject to review, a spokeswoman for the agency said, "We are reviewing a wide range of regulations and will have more to report in the coming weeks."

On the flip side, Delach said it is also unclear if executive actions that folded themselves into Obama's Climate Action Plan — also dismantled under Trump's energy order — could themselves be subject to repeal, a kind of guilt by association.

"It remains to be seen what policies are identified and which recommendations will be made for changes," said Alex Daue, assistant director for energy and climate with the Wilderness Society. "Overall any efforts to roll back these kind of policies is really going to take us backwards in responsible policy on public lands and protecting our national heritage."

## Mitigation policy scrapped

Interior yesterday also officially canceled the agency's three-year moratorium on federal coal leasing and disbanded a comprehensive review of the program started in 2016. In its place, Zinke announced he would re-establish a federal advisory committee made up of states, tribes and other advocacy groups to study whether Americans are getting a fair return on coal as well as oil and natural gas ([Greenwire](#), March 29).

Secretarial Order 3349 on "American Energy Independence" also revokes the department's 2014 policy document on offsetting development impacts on public lands, also known as mitigation ([E&E News PM](#), March 29).

Mitigation is the legal requirement federal agencies have to minimize any negative environmental impacts of major development projects and compensate for impacts that remain.

On the front end, mitigation might mean asking an oil and gas operator to move a pipeline 10 feet in order to protect the migration pattern for a species. On the back end, it could include setting reclamation requirements for operators in order to leave the land in good shape once the drilling is over.

The Interior order revokes S.O. 3330, which was signed by former Interior Secretary Sally Jewell in

October 2013. The order required the agency to compile a **report** titled, "A Strategy for Improving the Mitigation Policies and Practices of the Department of the Interior." Interior argued there was a "close nexus" between one Obama-era executive order nixed in Trump's order and S.O. 3330.

The goal of Jewell's S.O. 3330 was to improve mitigation polices departmentwide, use a landscape-level approach and focus on mitigation that improves the resilience of public lands in the face of climate change. The 25-page report, now up for re-examination, laid out best practices and made the case for landscape-scale mitigation.

"This is kind of basic stuff designed to help the agency explain what it's doing when it's attempting to mitigate adverse impacts," said Michael Saul, a senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity. "Rescinding that is just going to create confusion."

Ashley Korenblat, CEO of Western Spirit Cycling in Moab, Utah, and managing director of the nonprofit Public Land Solutions, said rolling back mitigation guidance will only hurt the rural communities Zinke and Trump are trying to help.

"If oil and gas operators doesn't have to clean up, it makes it that much harder for the communities to later invest in recreation, an increasingly important economic driver for rural communities," she said.

Mitigation is found in a wide range of laws that extend to policy on public lands, including in the Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

Daue, with the Wilderness Society, cautioned that means Interior will have to address it one way or another.

"What's really disappointing is we see the administration considering rolling back these policies that are just common-sense policies and capture lessons learned, and it doesn't in any way allow them to step away from their legal responsibilities."

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