

---

POLICY. SCIENCE. BUSINESS.

---

## INTERIOR

### Climate policies in limbo in Zinke's rollback playbook

Brittany Patterson, E&E News reporter

Published: Thursday, October 26, 2017

The Interior Department released a long-awaited report yesterday outlining policies it says should be repealed or reformed because they hinder U.S. energy production.

Unlike similar reports from some other agencies — that offered first glimpses into how they intend to carry out the Trump administration's energy policies — Interior's [report](#) from Secretary Ryan Zinke paints a picture of an agency already in the throes of reducing "regulatory burdens" for U.S. fossil fuel producers.

The impacts that regulatory roll backs could have on climate change were not mentioned in the report.

"Following President Trump's leadership, Interior is fostering domestic energy production by streamlining permitting and revising and repealing Obama-era job killing regulations — all while doing so in an environmentally responsible way," Zinke stated in a press release.

The document was drafted in response to President Trump's sweeping "energy independence" [executive order](#) issued in March that called upon federal agencies to review all rules and policies that may affect U.S. energy production.

The report kicks off by listing the "immediate action" Interior has already undertaken, which includes implementing six secretarial orders signed by Zinke. They accomplished a myriad of things, including ending the three-year moratorium on coal leasing and review of the federal coal program, developing a new five-year plan for offshore oil and gas leasing on the outer continental shelf and opening the door for additional drilling in Alaska.

To further facilitate energy development, Interior has also created a new position, the counselor to the secretary for energy policy, held by Vincent DeVito, the treasurer of Zinke's former political action committee.

Accompanying the agency's 44-page document was another secretarial order, which establishes a committee within Interior's Office of the Secretary that will focus on improving "aggressively the efficiency, effectiveness and accountability of its management of energy resources on Federal and Indian lands and the Outer Continental Shelf."

That order, [S.O. 3358](#), creates the "Executive Committee for Expedited Permitting," which is tasked with dealing with permitting backlogs and regulatory delays in order to "enhance our nation's energy dominance" including identifying "energy right-of-way corridors" on public lands and expediting environmental reviews.

In terms of climate change, the report noted that internal policies are still under review.

Over the last decade, Interior's 10 bureaus have developed enterprising, although arguably piecemeal, policies on how to adapt to and mitigate climate change on public lands. Many of those documents, policies and reports fell under review when Zinke issued his "American Energy Independence" secretarial order, which outlined how Interior would comply with Trump's executive action ([Climatewire](#), March 30).

In its new report, the agency writes it is reviewing bureau reports and other documents "relevant to climate" that may be a burden to energy development but has found few regulatory requirements. The agency noted it is also reviewing handbooks, memos, manuals and guidance "that inwardly focus their units and workforce management activities" on climate change.

The document also notes that the Bureau of Land Management recently rescinded a [permanent instruction memorandum](#) signed by Obama's Interior Secretary Sally Jewell that enabled the agency to use White House Council on Environmental Quality guidance to calculate the greenhouse gas emissions and impacts of climate change when crafting environmental reviews.

BLM "will consider" issuing new guidance on how to calculate direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions related to a proposed project, the report states.

Despite the work already underway at Interior, the agency also identified additional policies that may be hampering energy development. For example, the agency called for BLM to re-evaluate how it doles out certain land designations when crafting land management plans.

The report calls out more than 6 million acres of "Area of Critical Environmental Concern" designations in particular as possibly burdensome to energy development because they often connote that special management attention is needed to protect important historical or cultural values or to protect fish, wildlife or other natural resources. Drilling or mining can be prohibited.

Interior also calls for the review of policies that allow anyone to protest the inclusion parcel in an oil and gas lease sale, noting in fiscal 2016, 72 percent of parcels offered for lease were protested, up from 17 percent four years earlier.

"This uptick in the protest process and the inability to reach conclusive resolutions in a timely manner is a burden on oil and natural gas development on public lands," the document states. "A regulatory change may be necessary to limit redundant protests that hinder orderly development."

Environmental advocates decried the report but said they weren't surprised by its contents.

"It amounts to a sweeping playbook for how to turn over, wholesale, the management of public lands and water to industry," said Kate Kelly, public lands director for the Center for American Progress. "The Trump Administration is intent on putting oil, gas and coal companies in charge of when, where and how they exploit taxpayer-owned resources."

---

Twitter: [@amusedbrit](#) | Email: [bpatterson@eenews.net](mailto:bpatterson@eenews.net)

Advertisement

---

---

The essential news for energy & environment professionals

© 1996-2017 Environment & Energy Publishing, LLC [Privacy Policy](#) [Site Map](#) [Contact Us](#)

---