

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 22, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

In recent days the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the President have released multiple sweeping policy proposals that would harm our nation's environment and, particularly, our public lands. On February 12 the American people were given a budget for fiscal year 2019 that prioritizes oil, gas, and coal above all else, as well as an infrastructure plan that proposes to gut bedrock environmental protections and restrict public input in decisions that directly impact us all. The President's budget, and more specifically, your departmental request, would increase funds for fossil fuel programs while cutting renewable energy funding, despite paying lip service to an "all of the above" energy plan. On top of these misguided efforts, DOI has been working behind closed doors on a plan to subvert and steamroll the rights of Americans to oversee and comment on the actions of their elected officials and government bureaucrats.

On February 8, the Washington Post reported on the existence of a previously unreleased report titled, "BLM Report in Response to Secretarial Memorandum on Improving Planning and NEPA Processes and Secretarial Order 3355," (Report) and dated September 27, 2017. The Report makes a series of legislative, regulatory, and policy recommendations that would attempt to accelerate the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) permitting processes by circumventing environmental safeguards and reducing the level of oversight and input on environmental review processes; limiting public participation and oversight of the review process; and arbitrarily assigning exclusions and staffing to meet a timeline, rather than a peer-reviewed or scientifically-supported outcome. If enacted, many of these recommendations would result in dirtier air and water, reduced access to public lands for sportsmen and recreational businesses, and more lawsuits from people shut out from decisions that impact their homes, families, and communities.

Almost as disturbing as the policy changes recommended by the Report is the process by which it was generated. Instead of a *Federal Register* notice and a docket on Regulations.gov, the typical manner agencies use to solicit comments, the comment period was announced only via press release and comments were entered through a Google form on a BLM website, ensuring that the identity of commenters and the comments themselves were hidden from public view. In the

final report, only a hand-picked selection of anonymous comments—all supporting recommendations in the report—were provided in an appendix. Contrary opinions were omitted, leading to the false impression that all public feedback was supportive of BLM’s streamlining recommendations, but strongly supporting the conclusion that BLM and DOI under this administration are dismissive of opposing viewpoints.

To provide a more transparent understanding of the process that led to the Report and the steps to be taken because of it, we ask that you please provide the Natural Resources Committee the following information no later than March 15, 2018:

1. The details on all BLM efforts to solicit input from state, local, and tribal entities, as well as other external stakeholders, including the dates of any meetings, all requests from BLM for input, and all materials received from those entities or stakeholders.
2. The full text of all submissions received during the public comment period for the Report.
3. The status of all recommendations listed in the Report, including the recommendations that BLM or DOI intends to adopt but has not begun action on yet.
4. BLM’s rationale, including supporting documentation, for concluding that the actions recommended for categorical exclusions in the report will not cumulatively impact the environment.
5. An explanation of what is meant in the Report by “state and tribal environmental documents” for those states that do not have analogues to the National Environmental Policy Act.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on  
Natural Resources

Alan Lowenthal  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on  
Energy & Mineral Resources

A. Donald McEachin  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on  
Oversight & Investigations