



PEERreview

A Publication of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

Countering Western War on Wolves

Following removal of Endangered Species Act protections for the gray wolf in the waning weeks of the Trump administration, several Western states have declared open season on this alpha predator. PEER is working to curb the very practices that led to the near extinction of the gray wolf in the U.S., and ESA designation in the first place.

A typical example of these practices can be found in Idaho, which now authorizes killing 90% of the state's 1,500 wolves through expanded trapping and hunting. In Wyoming, wolves may be shot on sight with no season or bag limit restrictions, save for one buffer zone outside Yellowstone. Meanwhile, Montana has a year-round open hunting and trapping season on wolves, with a "bag limit" of 20 wolves a year.

Wolves in Yellowstone and Other Parks

The reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park is both a major tourist attraction and one of the major conservation achievements of the 20th century. However, in this past year, 25 "park" wolves were killed, and one major pack completely wiped out, when they strayed beyond park boundaries into Montana. In response, Montana lowered the annual take for a single hunter to six for areas abutting Yellowstone. Nonetheless, the viability of Yellowstone's wolf population is in question for the first time since their reintroduction.

Wolves in Alaska were never listed under the ESA, but that state is on a path to



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK/JON ANDERS WIKEN

Slaughter Is Not a Hunt. Wolves are being killed outside Alaskan national parks at such alarming rates that visitors have little chance to see them in the wild.

make wolves endangered. Its "Intensive Management" program to reduce predators, such as wolves and grizzly bears to increase "game" populations of caribou, moose, and deer, sets an annual goal of removing 100% of wolves in certain areas of Alaska.

While Denali, Glacier Bay, and Katmai National Parks are closed to hunting, wolf populations within those parks have been decimated by hunting and trapping on park borders. The wolves of Denali have historically been one of the world's most viewed. Yet, since the state removed the no-take buffers around the parks, wolf-viewing in Denali has fallen from the reported 45% success rate in 2010 to only 1% less than a decade later.

Similarly, Alaskan predator control has so diminished packs in the Yukon-Charley

Rivers National Preserve that the National Park Service ended a more than 20-year research program because the wolf population is "no longer in a natural state" and lacks enough survivors to maintain a "self-sustaining population."

While litigation to re-list the gray wolf under the ESA goes on, PEER is engaged on multiple fronts to curb renewed wolf eradication.

End Federal Subsidies for Rogue Agencies

PEER is leading a drive to deny federal wildlife management funding to states that excessively target predators, such as wolves, cougars, and grizzlies. This rule-making petition would have the Interior Department start enforcing requirements that federal grants must support diverse



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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Saving Species Under Threat

A major reason that public employees come to us for assistance is because we can help in their efforts to care for and protect the Earth's remaining biodiversity.

Such is the case with our work on the North Atlantic right whale. For over a decade, PEER has been pressuring the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to take stronger steps to protect the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale from extinction. In 2019, we filed a scientific integrity complaint documenting how NOAA had made false statements and omitted mention of scientific research in a court case showing that more protections were needed to protect the imperiled right whale from extinction.

This September, we were delighted to have a former NOAA scientist who assisted us in filing this complaint, Dr. Peter Corkeron, give remarks and host a Q&A session at an in-person screening of the film, *The Last of the Right Whales*. The film documents the threats to the critically endangered North Atlantic right whales. Most often these deaths are from entanglements in fishing gear and ship strikes.

Dr. Corkeron is now a Senior Scientist at the New England Aquarium. He is one of countless scientists who have come to PEER to help us push the government to do a better job saving species, habitats, and ecosystems, and to recognize the seriousness of the extinction crisis and to act accordingly.

We are also currently working with current and former government employees to protect the sage grouse, sea turtles, crabs, the Louisiana Black Bear, manatees, and wolves.

Protecting biodiversity is one of the great challenges of our time period. However, as our work on the right whale illustrates, campaigning to protect species is a long-term endeavor, and progress is often incremental. After years of prodding and lawsuits, NOAA is now implementing stricter speed limits for boats in some areas and contemplating greater testing of ropeless fishing gear. But much more needs to be done.

By being a voice for those in government who believe we need to be better stewards for all living things, we can work together to protect the enormous diversity of life on earth. As we have witnessed firsthand with the endangered right whale, too much is at stake to do otherwise.

Yours in the Fight,

— **Tim Whitehouse, Executive Director**

P.S. We hope you will sign our petition urging NOAA to move swiftly to require ropeless gear in certain fisheries to protect the North Atlantic right whale.



About Us

PEER protects public employees who protect our environment. We are a service organization for local, state, federal, and tribal public employees, including scientists, law enforcement officers, land managers, and all others dedicated to upholding environmental laws and values. Through PEER, public servants can choose to work as “anonymous activists”, so that public agencies must confront the message, rather than the messenger.

PFAS/FOREVER CHEMICALS

Forever Chemicals Global Reach

New research shows environmental contamination from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) has exceeded a new planetary boundary – limits within which humans can survive. Looking at levels of just four PFAS (known as perfluoroalkyl acids, or PFAAs) – PFOA, PFOS, PFHxS, and PFNA – in rainwater, soils, and surface waters globally, researchers found that governmental health advisories were exceeded worldwide, even in remote locations such as Antarctica.

Levels of PFOA and PFOS in rainwater already exceed U.S. EPA's Interim Health Advisory Levels. That rain, in turn, contaminates soils, surface, and drinking water. Reducing contamination to within these Health Advisories is not likely without a ban on new PFAS entering the ecosystem. It will also involve a huge cleanup investment given that most drinking water sources on the planet will have PFAS levels above the advisory levels.

The authors cautioned that soils are already contaminated with PFAS due to atmospheric deposition, but if soils are amended with biosolids (see accompanying story), PFAS levels in soils will dramatically increase.

Many scientists assumed that PFAAs would eventually reach the ocean, where they would be diluted. But certain PFAS, including the four PFAAs in this study, “can be significantly enriched on sea spray aerosols and transported in the atmosphere back to shore where they will be deposited and contaminate freshwaters, drinking waters, and surface soils.” In other words, this cycle of PFAS in the hydrosphere means that levels of PFAAs in rainwater “will be practically irreversible.”



PHOTO: NASA

Nowhere Left to Hide. Forever chemicals accumulating in Antarctic waters and ice.

The study's authors conclude that “it is of great importance to avoid further escalation of the problem of large-scale and long-term environmental and human exposure to PFAS by rapidly restricting uses of PFAS wherever possible.”

That is why our PFAS work is a top priority at PEER. This research also reinforces that EPA's whack-a-mole approach of regulating PFAS one by one, instead of as a class of chemicals, will doom us to adverse health outcomes for generations to come. EPA must regulate PFAS as a broad class and ban all non-essential uses immediately. We will continue to work to that end.

Closing a Key PFAS Pathway: Biosolid Sewage Fertilizer

In a tale of unintended consequences, the U.S. EPA has long encouraged the recycling of sewage sludge as fertilizer. But the agency turned a largely blind eye to the array of chemical contaminants contained in that sludge. One fast accumulating class of contaminants, PFAS, can no longer be ignored.

As much as 5 percent of all U.S. crop fields may be using sludge as fertilizer and as many as 20 million acres (roughly the size of Maine) may be contaminated. These numbers are estimates because,

for obvious reasons, farmers have little incentive to find out if their fields are contaminated.

Among others, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack is sounding the alarm, declaring that PFAS cleanup of agricultural land will require significant funds, admitting “I think we need a national standard.” But such a regulatory tool is not yet on the horizon.

Until a solution is implemented, it is paramount that we stop spreading PFAS-laden

biosolid fertilizer across our farmlands, golf courses, and gardens. The Clean Water Act requires EPA to review sewage sludge standards every two years to identify toxic pollutants that occur in biosolids and then set regulations for those pollutants to prevent harm to human health or the environment. EPA has yet to do so for PFAS. Adoption of standards to keep PFAS out of publicly-manufactured fertilizer seems like a no-brainer but will require a lot of effort to accomplish. That's why we are making it a PEER priority in the coming year.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

EPA Staggers Toward Chemical Safety



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK/MARRITCH

Fumigant Fiasco. EPA managers met with the Telone manufacturer at least five times without entering those meetings into the official pesticide-registration review docket.

For the past two-plus years, PEER has represented a network of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency chemists, toxicologists, and other scientific specialists who have documented that the agency's vaunted efforts at protecting Americans from harmful chemical exposures has been a bust.

The 2016 Frank Lautenberg Act, named after the late New Jersey Senator, was a statutory sea change in chemical regulation. It will require that all new (and some existing) chemicals be screened to prevent substances posing unreasonable and substantial risks from reaching the marketplace. The law's initial implementation thus fell to the Trump administration which brought in appointees from the chemical industry to gut new safeguards.

Our clients had hoped that the Biden appointees would reverse many of these improper strictures but thus far we have been disappointed. Since Biden appointees were confirmed, PEER has filed a series of disclosures with EPA's Office of Inspector General (IG), which has assembled an impressive team to seriously pursue each issue. The first critical IG reports are just now reaching publication.

Big Victory in Small Doses

In late August, EPA dropped a 25-year policy in which it applied a "minimum

threshold" that avoided even assessing the risk of chemicals, no matter how toxic, if it deemed the likelihood of public exposure to be low.

Our clients found that more than half of the 368 new chemicals submitted to EPA in 2020, pose risks that the agency deemed "negligible" and thus did not calculate. Yet, many of these chemicals present real dangers even in small doses and are especially lethal in "fence-line communities," usually poorer areas afflicted by small but steady exposure from smokestacks and landfill runoff.

While we are happy that EPA has finally dropped its minimum threshold policy, it has only done so prospectively. Meaning that EPA will not re-assess the hundreds of toxic chemicals already wrongly approved.

Fumigant Fraud

Meanwhile, an IG report has found that EPA improperly downgraded the cancer classification of one of the nation's most popular fumigants.

In 2020, EPA revised its human health risk assessment of 1,3-dichloropropene (1,3-D), a Dow Chemical soil fumigant (brand name Telone) by downgrading its prior cancer classification from "likely to be carcinogenic to humans" to "suggestive evidence of carcinogenic potential." This

downgrade allowed higher amounts of the chemical to be sprayed into the air without being considered a health risk.

The IG found that EPA managers used an inaccurate literature search that excluded relevant studies, including one concluding that Telone causes DNA damage. Furthermore, EPA ignored its own procedures for ensuring scientific integrity, transparency, and peer review – lapses for which the agency offered no explanation.

Corrosive Carousel

The IG is also reviewing our charges that EPA has repeatedly blocked legally required risk calculations for new chemicals that are highly corrosive, thereby subjecting workers to dangerous exposures. Besides cancer risks, these inappropriate EPA practices mask severe developmental effects, such as miscarriage, damage to eyes, lungs, and other tissue, as well as a range of other adverse impacts, some of which can occur from one-time exposures.

These are not honest mistakes but carry the earmarks of deliberate malfeasance. We remain determined to root these bad apples out.



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK/LITTLEWOLF1989

Once Burned, Not Necessarily Twice Shy. EPA managers ordered assessors to underestimate corrosive chemical risks by assuming that workers will avoid exposure once (and if) they realize that the substances are corrosive.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Park Air Tour Curbs: Off Schedule and Off Course

It took a court order to end decades of foot-dragging against reigning in the thousands of noisy tourist overflights buzzing across national parks. Now, the first three National Park Air Tour Management Plans have been finalized but a score more parks will miss a court-ordered deadline altogether and many of those will be incomplete, lacking legally required environmental reviews

In 2020, PEER won a court judgment ordering the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Park Service to finally implement the National Park Air Tour Management Act of 2000, which requires regulation of overflights. The U.S. Court of Appeals set a deadline for August 31st of this year, but, as that date neared, the agencies began to admit their inability to comply, and estimated slippage widened with each “progress report.”

Even worse, the agencies have shirked their legal duty to conduct a thorough environmental review with public involvement, as specified in the National Environmental Policy Act. Instead, they merely grandfather in all existing flights previously approved on an “interim” basis without examination of impacts regardless of traffic volume, routes, or flight hours.

This July, just as the agencies were ordered to answer a PEER enforcement motion, they announced the first-ever Air Tour Management Plans for three parks with the least air traffic: Death Valley, Olympic, and Mt. Rainier. But progress is being made.



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK/KOVALENKO I

Uncertain Take-Off. Management plans for 20 national parks are still overdue, but progress touches down at Glacier with an end to overflights in sight.

In September, the Park Service announced that it would end overflights at Glacier National Park in 7 years.

“While we are glad the agencies are at long last starting to do their jobs, the quality and integrity of their work leaves a lot to be desired,” stated PEER General Counsel Paula Dinerstein. “In the coming weeks, we will yet again ask the Court to enforce the law and end the reign of unmanaged overflights across our national parks.”

Speed Up Park Plastic Ban – Two Not Ten Years

Following a PEER-led plastic bottle ban petition drive, the Biden administration this June directed all Department of the Interior agencies, including the National Park Service, to reduce plastic waste by 2032. Contending that the schedule is too slow, PEER is leading a coalition urging the Park Service to stop signing multi-year concessioner contracts for single-use plastic bottle sales now, rather than waiting for years to make such decisions.

Disposable plastic bottles are the biggest component of park waste streams. Mountains of single-use plastics burden wildlife, create greenhouse gases, pollute waters, and cost taxpayers to haul away. As visitation rebounds to record levels, waves of plastic waste are again swamping parks.

“Should there be a change of administration, this Biden plan could be wiped out before it has even really begun,” remarked Rocky Mountain PEER Director Chandra Rosenthal. “We need a laser focus on what we can accomplish in the next two years.”

“Be Smarter Than Your Cellphone” Park Urges



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK/GRISPB

Death by App. Death Valley says off-roaders, misled by phone apps, are increasingly stranded on backcountry roads.

As it recovers from an epic flood, Death Valley National Park is urging motorists to stay off dirt roads and ignore phone apps. “Please be smarter than your smartphones,” warned Superintendent Mike Reynolds. Other parks report more hikers led astray by phone-based navigation. Yet another unconsidered consequence of spreading commercial connectivity in our national parks.



CLIMATE CHANGE

Curbing Super-Greenhouse Gas –SF-6



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK/MULDERPHOTO

Most Potent Greenhouse Gas Ever Known. Concentrations of SF6 in the atmosphere have been steadily rising since the mid-1970s, prompting EPA to institute a program to limit its use.

PEER is pushing to end a program releasing significant amounts of the most destructive greenhouse gas ever known. The National Science Foundation (NSF) is funding projects on federal lands using sulfur hexafluoride (SF6), a greenhouse gas 22,800 times more potent at trapping atmospheric heat than carbon dioxide and with a far longer atmospheric lifespan of 3,200 years.

Over its lifetime, the project has used 108 pounds of SF6 on a total of 24 sites primarily in national parks and forests. That is equivalent to burning more than a million pounds of coal. Ironically, the SF6 is being used to gauge the impact of climate change on freshwater streams.

Responding to months of protests from National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service scientists, NSF agreed to reduce its SF6 usage to ten sites for another three years. PEER is asking NSF to stop using SF6 at all sites immediately, noting that there are safe alternatives, such as argon which is not a greenhouse gas. We are also asking the Park and Forest Services to cease issuing research permits involving SF6.

Building Better Climate Solutions

PEER's Climate Integrity Project is working to develop sustainable solutions to the climate crisis while strengthening transparency in climate programs. Here are two examples on opposite sides of the country where PEER is engaged in trying to alter projects that are billed as "green," but will cause needless environmental destruction. In these two cases, PEER is pushing for alternative locations for these projects.

Green-Link to Brown-Link

When Congress created the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument in 2014 near Las Vegas, it also authorized a nearby electric transmission corridor (now called "Greenlink") to carry "primarily renewable" power. Fast forward to today, the transmission corridor is tied to natural gas facilities and has been rerouted (we believe illegally) to cross the Monument. Yet, the project is being fast-tracked by the Department of the Interior under a climate banner.



PHOTO: NPS

Fossils to Facilitate Fossil Fuels. Tule Springs was made a national monument to protect invaluable Ice Age paleontological discoveries.

Destroying Sears Island

Maine wants to develop a flotilla of floating wind turbines. In searching for a logistical hub and port to operate this array, the state is signaling that it wants to develop Sears Island, the largest undeveloped island on the east coast of the United States. However, Mack Point, located across the bay from Sears Island, which has been an industrial port for decades, is the location favored by local communities and is perfectly suitable for this type of operation.



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK/BERT FOLSOM

Waiting for Cement. Sears Island is the largest undeveloped island left on the U.S. eastern seaboard.

Watching Carbon Agriculture Markets



PHOTO: BLM/FLICKR

Agriculture carbon markets are not climate smart

PEER and twelve other advocacy groups have asked the USDA to reopen a comment period on the environmental review of its “climate smart” agriculture grant program, which aims to develop agriculture carbon markets and assist market participants.

In these markets, the sellers, typically farmers, are paid for generating carbon

credits by adopting management practices that meet specific ecosystem criteria. Once the carbon credit is generated, it is then sold into a market where buyers can purchase those credits to offset their own climate pollution and meet their sustainability goals.

As part of its climate mitigation goals, the Biden administration plans to distribute

approximately \$3 billion to fund farming, ranching, and forestry projects with the goal of supporting the development of these markets. To rush the first 70 grants forward, the USDA pushed out its environmental review of the program after giving the public only 14 days to comment.

PEER opposes the use of market-based approaches that rely on agricultural programs to offset emissions produced by other industries to meet emission reduction goals. There is ample evidence that offset markets do not work well. They have proven to be costly and largely ineffective. Rather than throwing billions of good into creating complex and unenforceable climate markets, USDA should skip the carbon markets and establish programs that directly incentivize or require agricultural conservation practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and work to ensure it distributes its resources equitably to farmers.

USDA also needs to allow for meaningful public input as it doles out billions of dollars in grants for these programs.

Manchin Side Deal, Tabled for Now

In a surprise turn of events, the Senate removed a controversial energy permitting provision, backed by Senator Joe Manchin and the fossil fuel industry, from a must-pass budget continuing resolution. The provision – referred to as a ‘side deal’ negotiated between Senator Manchin and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer – would have fast-tracked oil and gas infrastructure development, including the Mountain Valley Pipeline that would go from West Virginia to Virginia.

The side deal, which PEER strongly opposed, would have simplified the

permitting process for oil and gas projects, weakened environmental reviews of such projects under the National Environmental Policy Act, and limited the ability of state and tribal governments to weigh in on energy projects on their lands under the Clean Water Act.

Supporters of the side deal promise to reintroduce it this coming session. If so, we will be there to oppose it. To build a just and equitable clean energy transition, we must have meaningful environmental reviews of new energy projects and strong community participation. This bill makes those reviews and participation much more difficult.



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK/FOTOFOTOFOTO

Efforts to fast-track fossil fuel infrastructure are on the back burner, for now.



PROTECTING SCIENCE



PHOTO: NPS

Biden's Scientific Integrity Task Force

Launched just days after his inauguration, President Biden's Scientific Integrity Initiative is not off to an auspicious start. It had raised expectations by recognizing that efforts undertaken under Obama did not work, and the Trump experience made it clear that fundamental change was needed to prevent a future reign of "alternative facts."

To accomplish this, President Biden created a Task Force with 40+ agency representatives under the direction of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). Then, this February, his OSTP Director Eric Lander was forced to resign for bullying and harassing his staff.

The mantle then passed to Deputy OSTP Director Jane Lubchenco who, this August, was sanctioned by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) for misconduct with respect to a paper that was retracted. Lubchenco has been barred for five years from being involved in other NAS publications, programs, or awards.

Meanwhile, the multi-agency Task Force is behind schedule in producing a "Framework" to guide agency revisions of their scientific integrity policies. PEER is concerned that relying upon the agencies and managers to police themselves is doomed to failure. PEER is urging the White House to instead adopt clear, government-wide rules that spell out –

- How allegations of scientific misconduct will be independently investigated, adjudicated, including against political appointees;
- The rights of all scientists to publish or lecture without official approval; and
- Enforceable legal protection for scientists facing retaliation due to the policy implications or controversial nature of their research.

We're told the Task Force recommendations will be out soon. It remains to be seen if the White House will act on our advice.



EPA's Scientific Integrity Program Falls Short

In its latest report to Congress, EPA's Office of Inspector General stated that the Scientific Integrity Program had reported 22 cases where it had substantiated misconduct charges brought against the agency either by its own employees or outside entities. To find out more, PEER submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for their subject matter and outcome, and so far as of this printing:

- So far, the EPA has been only able to produce one case, not the 22 reported to the IG;
- In that one case, the scientists (represented by PEER) felt that none of the underlying problems had been corrected and filed a new complaint. After it was filed, a Scientific Integrity Officer sent the scientists' names throughout the division and convened a meeting of the accused managers; and
- "Open" scientific misconduct allegations date back to 2015, with most filed during the Trump administration.

The upshot is that EPA's scientific integrity program appears ineffective and in disarray. For EPA managers, the program appears to be used as political window dressing. For scientists and staff who want to bring forth complaints of violations, the program ends up suffocating misconduct cases until they are dropped so that they never see the light of day. This is an example of the failures we are pressing the Biden White House to correct.

STATES

Boeing Sweetheart Cleanup Deal Draws Lawsuit

California's Newsom administration has cut a backroom deal with the Boeing Company to dramatically weaken clean-up standards at the profoundly polluted Santa Susana Field Laboratory. PEER is leading a coalition in a lawsuit charging that the deal and an accompanying promise to free Boeing from toxic stormwater discharge requirements run afoul of California's Environmental Quality Act. Our co-plaintiffs include the principal community group, Parents Against Santa Susana Field Lab and Physicians for Social Responsibility (LA Chapter).

"We do not want to slow down this overdue cleanup that was supposed to have been completed back in 2017," stated Pacific PEER Director Jeff Ruch. "We just want to make sure that the cleanup is done right and goes farther than this 'rip and skip' deal Boeing claims as a 'win-win.'"

After repeatedly promising to enforce a legally binding 2007 cleanup agreement with Boeing, the Newsom administration secretly negotiated an 800-page agreement that "supersedes" the prior order by substantially relaxing key cleanup requirements, allowing hundreds of times higher levels of toxic chemicals than previously permitted, and leaving as much as 90% of the contamination on-site.



PHOTO: WILLIAM PRESTON BROWNING

What Flows Downhill. Located in the hills above the San Fernando and Simi Valleys, Santa Susana is one of California's most toxic places, the site of a reactor meltdown, and polluted by decades of rocket-testing, and other activities.

The deal is so bad that the Chair of the Regional Water Quality Control Board resigned and testified against it as a private citizen. He is joining with PEER to ensure that a full cleanup takes place.

Update: EPA Validates Colorado Whistleblowers

In a July report, the U.S Environmental Protection Agency confirmed air pollution lapses identified by Colorado state air modelers represented by PEER. The whistleblowers had filed a complaint detailing how Colorado's Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE) allows excessive release of harmful pollutants in areas already out of compliance with federal standards.

In response to the complaint filed by PEER, the EPA report cited "important concerns with the state's implementation" of air pollution permits, risking "harm to air quality and public health." EPA recommended that CDPHE take several actions and report back by October 21 – including correcting all 11 permits identified by the whistleblowers and stopping the splitting up "complex and multi-year projects" to evade pollution limits.

"CDPHE has been aware of every fact in this report for years. While we are happy that EPA validated these damning disclosures, the state has yet to institute meaningful reforms or even fully staff the modeling division," Rocky Mountain PEER Director Chandra Rosenthal noted. We are waiting for the state's October report to the EPA.

Last of the Right Whales



PHOTO: HITPLAY PRODUCTIONS

Dr. Peter Corkeron, one of the world's leading marine mammal experts, was the keynote speaker at PEER's in-person and virtual screening of the *Last of the Right Whales* on September 16th in

Washington, DC. A top PEER priority is pushing the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to require ropeless fishing gear in certain fisheries. Rope entanglements are a leading cause of death of the critically endangered North Atlantic right whales.



PEER PERSPECTIVES

Insurrection Resurrection



Former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke

Hastily resigning after less than two scandal-plagued years, the former Interior Secretary is now running for a newly created House seat in Montana. As a campaign centerpiece, Zinke pledges to introduce a Federal Employee Accountability and Reduction Act – appropriately acronym-ed the FEAR Act – to make it much easier to fire federal employees. Zinke decries bureaucrats enjoying “their free ride” on the federal payroll that he now seeks to rejoin. While his bill has some draconian provisions, Zinke undeniably knows a lot about the abuse of power and corrupt cronyism.



BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management finally issued a grazing permit on public lands for bison, rather than cattle. BLM approved a plan by American Prairie Reserve, to reintroduce bison on 63,500 acres in Phillips County, Montana. In doing so, BLM overcame vociferous opposition from ranchers and Republican politicians in Director Manning’s home state. In rejecting these vehement protests, BLM stated that the “unfavorable views of the proposal itself do not constitute scientific controversy, disagreement about the nature of effects, or provide evidence that the project is not in conformance to BLM’s statutory and regulatory requirements.” The biggest irony was livestock groups complaining that the BLM (long derided as the Bureau of Livestock and Mining) was bowing to special interests.



U.S. Senator Charles Grassley

This Iowa Republican has long been a champion of government whistleblowers and a relatively sane voice in an increasingly extremist party. But as he campaigns for his 8th Senate term, he appears to have gone off the rails, as evidenced by his statements on newly enacted legislation to hire more Internal Revenue Service agents. IRS staffing last increased over 50 years ago, as tax enforcement has plummeted, with audits of millionaires down to historic lows. While only 1% of agents hired will be authorized to carry firearms, Grassley went on Fox News to warn that IRS agents will be coming with loaded “AK-15s” and “ready to shoot some small businessperson in Iowa.” It is unfortunate to see someone with Sen. Grassley’s record stoop to the type of dangerous “jack-booted thugs” rhetoric directed at federal workers in the months leading up to the tragic 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.



San Francisco Mayor London Breed

Hunters Point Naval Shipyard on San Francisco Bay has been a Superfund site since 1989 due to high levels of radiation left behind by ill-conceived attempts to decontaminate ships exposed to atmospheric H-bomb tests. PEER exposed widespread fraud in this site clean-up, which still languishes. As reported in the last issue, the San Francisco Grand Jury raised a new concern in a report this spring – sea-level rise threatens to submerge mountains of toxic material still buried on-site into the Bay. The Navy’s clean-up plans do not account for climate change. The Grand Jury urged local officials to explore the issue, but Mayor London Breed, a Democrat with very close ties to developers, dismissed the report, declaring “It’s a disgrace” because the Navy clean-up has been “extensive and thorough.” With officials like Breed, no wonder Hunters Point has been a Superfund site for 30-plus years, with no end in sight.



U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan

While sponsoring unprecedented infrastructure investments, President Biden also rescinded Trump rules gutting the National Environmental Policy Act, the key law ensuring that project planning is done in an environmentally responsible fashion. During a debate on the topic, Alaska Republican Dan Sullivan waxed hyperbolic, exclaiming “We’re going to have a simple vote on where you stand – with the people who take a shower before work or the people who take a shower after work; the people who spend their days holding tools to build things or holding lattes; the people with dirt under their fingernails.” Setting aside this self-proclaimed working-class hero’s hygiene regime, Sullivan patronizes all laborers by presuming they share his know-nothing politics. Yet another example of why the Senate is known as the Hall of Winds.



Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry

Landry wants to punish New Orleans officials for their opposition to the Pelican State’s new no-exceptions abortion ban. To do so, he is trying to block a line of credit to modernize the 50-year-old drainage pumps protecting the city’s 384,000 residents from flooding. A Republican positioning himself for a gubernatorial run, Landry earlier tried to cut off all state funding to the Crescent City over the issue. The Democratic state senator representing much of the city decried Landry’s “pro-life” rationale, arguing: “Don’t tell me you love me but you’re not willing to keep me from drowning.”

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Scraping the Gulf Seafloor

PEER is pressing the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to stop scraping sea bottoms in the Gulf of Mexico for fishery studies. NOAA's own scientists say NOAA trawls needlessly damage coral and other marine habitats for data that can be obtained less obtrusively.

Every year, NOAA conducts roughly 600 bottom trawls in the Gulf of Mexico offshore of Brownville, Texas to west of central Florida to collect information about the relative abundance and life history of marine life. In a letter to the NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad, PEER points out that these trawls:

- Inherently create ecological havoc, often requiring years to recover;

- Result in lost equipment, leaving tons of floating nets, called "ghost fishing," that persist for decades; and,
- Drag up tons of coral and sponges that are not studied, but simply discarded.

"Ironically, NOAA's own policies are designed to minimize the very type of damage these research trawls cause," stated PEER Executive Director Tim Whitehouse, noting that NOAA can obtain the same research data through methods that do not harm the live sea bottom habitats, such as longline surveys, and midwater – as opposed to sea bottom – trawl surveys. "The Deepwater Horizon disaster has already stressed the Gulf's marine flora and fauna as never before. If NOAA has non-destructive



PHOTO: ADOBE STOCK/AHMED AREEF/EYEEM

Ghost Fishing. Lost trawling gear can continue to kill marine life for years.

means of obtaining the same information, then it is time to retire the sea bottom trawling nets."

"When PEER Wins, You Win"



Helen Pent Jenkins,
Director of Development

The Fall season is finally upon us, and I am encouraged and inspired by all of PEER's success over the last year. From calling out dirty fuels in renewable energy portfolios to winning cases on e-bikes and air tours on public lands, PEER's wins mean protection for the environment and public health. As we look at all of PEER's accomplishments, I'm grateful for your steady support. Your generosity to PEER in 2022 means that we can keep the pressure on government to be more transparent and accountable and to use the best science in

decision making. Your generosity has also had a disproportionate impact on whistleblowers because as a nimble organization, we can take on controversial and lengthy cases knowing that our supporters are with us till the win. Even in cases that take years, where the result is uncertain, PEER can stand proud and know that it has fought well and fought truthfully. Each case and each issue is one step closer to the vision of a transparent and accountable government that protects those that protect the environment. Remember, when PEER wins, we all win.

We Thank You!

Thank you to the 41 people who made their first-time gift to PEER this quarter.

PEER would like to thank the following Foundations for their continued support:

*Park Foundation
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COUNTERING WESTERN WAR ON WOLVES — Continued from page 1 ►



PHOTO: PEER

Unfair Chase. Alaska allows wolves to be shot from snowmobiles, airplanes, inside wintering dens, and using blinding night lights.

wildlife populations and healthy predator-prey dynamics.

This federal aid constitutes a significant portion of state game agency budgets. This year, approximately \$1 billion in federal aid was funneled to state game agency coffers and accounts for between

a quarter and two-thirds of the total state wildlife budgets. Our petition is cosponsored by 25 conservation groups and garnered 17,000 signatures before it hit Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland's desk.

Meanwhile, we are tracing the misuse of federal wildlife aid by state agencies, seeking a return of misused funds and sanctions against miscreant agencies.

Expose Corruption

In Colorado, PEER exposed a senior state wildlife official who was using public resources in a private campaign against the reintroduction of wolves, as approved by state voters in 2020. This ended his attempts to block the release of wolves in Colorado and led to his removal from the program.

State wildlife officials know that they can enlist PEER in combating backroom

dealing to the detriment of wildlife. And, importantly, PEER is willing to "name names" and go after conflicts of interest and other official misconduct.

Protect the Science – and the Scientists

In several states, PEER is working to protect agency and state university scientists whose work often draws retaliation from state livestock interests. We also work to prevent key research – such as studies showing that wolf removal does not lead to significant increases in elk population – from being buried under political pressure. In addition, we have directly taken on state legislators and politically connected ranchers who try to bully scientists into silence.

The net result is that PEER remains a national force for curbing rabid predator control and restoring ecological balance in America's outdoors.