



PEERreview

A Publication of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

Government Chaos Demands a Congressional Oversight Agenda

Across the Trump administration, the warning signs are flashing red. Every day brings new examples of blatant self-dealing, conflicts of interest, and the intentional destruction of our country’s ability to respond to basic environmental and public health threats.

People are fed up with this administration, and Congress is beginning to listen.

In a midterm election year, congressional oversight and investigations are an important way for lawmakers to influence policy directions and shine a light on important issues.

Through hearings, document requests, and independent investigations, congressional committees can examine presidential actions, investigate waste, fraud, and abuse, root out conflicts of interest, and review whether agencies are faithfully executing the law.

With national elections just around the corner, PEER is stepping up its efforts to engage in congressional oversight activities, including:

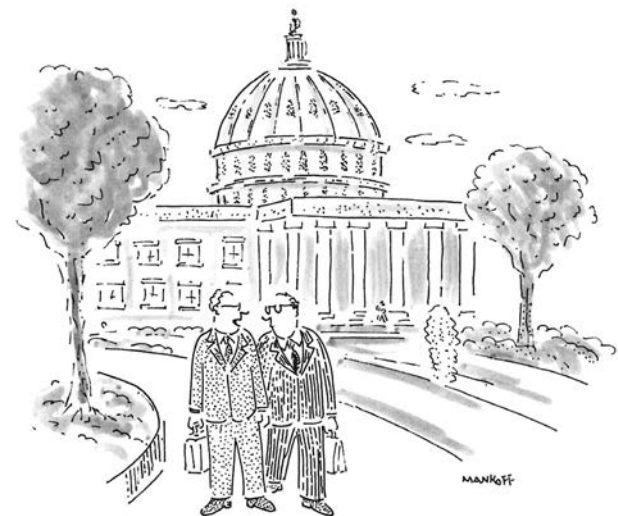
Corruption and Self-Dealing

Freedom 250: Freedom 250, a private entity, is selling access to President Trump, awarding contracts to allies of the administration, and using taxpayer funds and National Park Service resources to push partisan initiatives. Congressional committees must monitor the money, compel disclosures, and ensure that public office is not being used for private enrichment.

Federal Workforce Issues

Staffing Chaos: The administration continues to rapidly politicize our country’s merit-based civil service, arbitrarily slash the federal workforce, institute nonsensical agency reorganizations, and eliminate critical environmental and science programs. PEER is urging rigorous congressional oversight of personnel actions in the past year and future plans for the federal workforce, including the use of loyalty oaths to hire and purge public employees.

Attacks on Free Speech: Employees at numerous federal agencies, like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), have been fired or punished for exercising their First Amendment rights. The intent is clear: the administration is imposing a political loyalty test on career civil servants



"But how do you know for sure you've got power unless you abuse it?"

PHOTO: CARTOONSTOCK.COM

The Tide is Turning. People are fed up with this administration, and Congress is beginning to listen.

and squashing dissent. Congressional committees should investigate this purge and retaliation campaign and hold those violating federal statutes accountable.

Artificial Intelligence: AI is being introduced into some of the most consequential decision-making processes in government. At the same time, traditional safeguards—such as inspectors general, whistleblower protections, and transparency requirements—are broken. Congressional committees must examine the government’s growing use of AI to make decisions, surveil government employees, and investigate questionable government AI contracts.

Appropriated Funds: Agencies are disregarding congressional spending requirements. Through delays, withholding of funds, and selective implementation, the administration is ignoring the constitutional provision

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PEERreview is the quarterly newsletter of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**Turning the Corner**

Dear Friends,

As spring quickly envelops the air, what will the coming seasons bring to our work at PEER?

On the one hand, I am optimistic. The tide appears to be turning on this administration's brutal attacks on public servants, environmental protections, and public lands.

More and more Americans and members of Congress across the political spectrum are becoming increasingly repulsed by this president's cruelty towards federal workers and those groups advocating for safe food, clean air and water, and protections for the land and wildlife.

They are not alone in their disgust.

From the news, polling, and talking to friends and neighbors, it has become clear that Americans are fed up with the administration's lies and crony capitalism and the impacts of these actions on the world around us.

However, with this unstable regime teetering, I know it is impossible to predict what will come next in this country and how that will affect our work together.

We do know, however, that civil servants and the environment will continue to be in the administration's crosshairs. Over the past year, countless civil servants have come forward at great personal risk to stand up for strong environmental and public health protections and to expose wrongdoing, malfeasance, and corruption in their agencies.

More will come forward in the coming months. As they do, it is important that we continue to listen to their stories and support them in their work.

They will continue to alert the American public to the administration's harmful actions while bearing the brunt of the administration's dangerous authoritarian power grab.

That is why this spring, we are recommitting ourselves to defending these employees, addressing their environmental concerns, and bringing their ideas and energy to the battle.

Take care,

Tim Whitehouse

Executive Director

P.S. We would like to thank our supporters for generously contributing to our Litigation Fund campaign this spring. If you would like to donate, visit peer.org/donate

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.

Problems with SpaceX’s AI Satellite Plan

PEER is pressing the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to formally consider the environmental impacts of SpaceX’s plan to launch up to a million satellites into low orbit. SpaceX plans to use satellites to expand artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure by delivering power to thousands of data centers.

This plan would entail thousands of space launches each year and result in many more satellites reentering the Earth’s atmosphere. It would dwarf the 14,500 active satellites currently in low Earth orbit and dramatically increase metals in the upper atmosphere, which could alter stratospheric temperatures, ozone coverage, and geomagnetic signals relied on by migratory birds, some of which are highly endangered species. These satellites would also emit huge amounts of artificial light in the night sky,

with potential biological effects on human health, plants, and animals.

“While this plan may be a big technological leap forward, all we are asking is that the FCC take a good, hard look before taking that leap,” said PEER Executive Director Tim Whitehouse, who is asking the FCC to conduct the environmental review required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other laws before approving the plan.

In its filings with the FCC, SpaceX did not explain how it will address the array of potential environmental problems. Instead, it promises to use a “phased deployment approach for this system to monitor actual atmospheric effects.” Significantly, SpaceX admits that it has yet to even develop “advanced brightness mitigation techniques” to minimize visual impacts.



PHOTO: FCC

Orbital Blanket. SpaceX is planning to launch up to a million satellites to power AI data centers.

“The FCC needs to understand and embrace the value that implementing a robust NEPA process can bring to its own decision-making, as well as improve the public’s confidence in the FCC’s independent oversight of this and other controversial proposals,” said Dinah Bear, former general counsel at the Council on Environmental Quality, who joined the PEER action, along with John Fitzgerald, formerly policy director of the Society for Conservation Biology.

Nighttime Sunlight from Space Warrants Review

Jointly with DarkSky International, PEER is also pressing the FCC to undertake a thorough environmental review before greenlighting a satellite to reflect sunlight back to Earth after dark. A company called Reflect Orbital is seeking approval to launch a prototype satellite with large (50+ meter) mirrors to reflect sunlight to specific locations on Earth after dark. This would allow the company to produce “sunlight on demand” and illuminate areas up to five kilometers wide at intensities several times brighter than a full moon.

Based on how the prototype performs,

the company then plans to launch a constellation of up to 50,000 satellites over the next nine years. The company concedes that it is not certain of what the effects of its operations will be but opposes any prior environmental review, contending that its orbital activities are not covered by NEPA. PEER and DarkSky counter that the company is misreading the law.

“Without such a review, there will be no required mitigation measures to lessen light pollution, prevent interrupted sleep cycles, avoid disrupting astronomy, and address other negative side effects

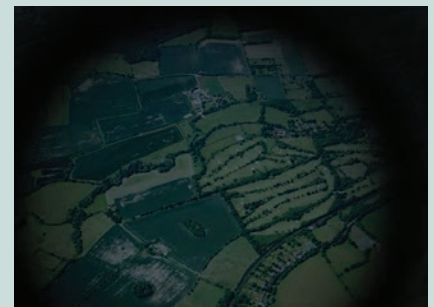


PHOTO: DARKSKY INTERNATIONAL

Bright Night. A satellite image representation shows the potential illumination from a Reflect Orbital device.

of lighting up the night sky, such as disruptions to wildlife,” stated PEER Executive Director Tim Whitehouse.



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Flying Blind: Demise of Science-based Land Management

America's vast western rangelands are in sharp decline, yet the Trump administration no longer wants to monitor the health of these landscapes. Statistics compiled from scientific assessments by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) show that the percentage of BLM lands classified as healthy dropped from 72% in 2022 to 58% in 2024, with future evaluations in doubt due to budget cuts.

Since 2011, BLM has operated the Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) program. It has been a cornerstone of science-based stewardship for millions of acres of federal rangelands, providing critical data on land health, invasive species, and native plant communities. AIM data are essential for detecting trends, planning adaptive management, and evaluating grazed lands.

Cuts to AIM, including reports of its

complete elimination in Wyoming and other states, threaten to dismantle federal land monitoring capabilities. In just the first year of Trump's second term, BLM lost nearly one-fifth of its entire staff, leading to steep reductions in the number of scientists and technical specialists available to conduct and analyze AIM surveys.

"Effective public lands management begins with understanding land health," said PEER's Western Lands and Rocky Mountain Advocate Chandra Rosenthal. "Without the data the AIM program provides, BLM is flying blind."

Recent AIM reports show troubling declines in land health. According to the most recent Public Lands Statistics report from June 2025, only 53% of BLM lands have intact native plant communities, while 59% of acres are affected by invasive plants.



PHOTO: CO WETLANDS INFO CENTER

Landscape Monitoring. BLM field crews collect repeatable, standardized measurements on randomly selected plots, allowing BLM to assess conditions across entire states and regions.

"These numbers reveal a landscape under pressure," added Rosenthal. "Monitoring isn't the problem—it's the solution. We need to know what's happening on the ground to respond effectively."

PFAS on Rangelands: Herbicide Folly

New independent testing by PEER has detected toxic per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) – also known as "forever chemicals" – in the herbicide Indaziflam, which is being sprayed across millions of acres of BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands. Although Indaziflam is promoted as a rangeland restorative, a growing body of scientific evidence indicates that it is harmful to human health, soil, native biodiversity, and aquatic systems.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency product label warns that Indaziflam can contaminate surface waters via runoff and is toxic to fish, vertebrates, and aquatic plants. This is a serious concern, given the extensive

network of streams, wetlands, and riparian corridors across public lands.

"The discovery of toxic chemicals in a product intended for landscape-level use should set off alarm bells," said Chandra Rosenthal, PEER's western lands and Rocky Mountain advocate, who is asking Colorado Governor Jared Polis to join 24 other states that have banned or are phasing out some products that contain PFAS. "Our public lands should not be exposed to chemicals whose impacts remain unknown, and that will persist in the environment indefinitely."

Because Indaziflam is nonselective, it eliminates some native annual plants that support pollinators and wildlife.

Field research underscores these risks. A Boulder County post-fire assessment found native species richness was 75% lower in sprayed areas compared to untreated zones, suggesting long-term ecological consequences.

"Land managers have safer, proven alternatives to spraying this agent," said David Jenkins, former senior executive at BLM. "Mechanical removal, restoration with native plants, and improved grazing management can reduce invasive grasses without introducing new toxic risks."

Read our letter to Governor Polis at peer.org/polis-letter

U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Administration Moves to Dismantle U.S. Forest Service Science

As part of a wide-reaching reorganization and headquarters move from DC to Utah, the U.S. Forest Service is shuttering more than 57 research stations. Rather than streamlining the agency, PEER argues that these moves render it less capable of addressing growing threats to forest health from wildfires, diseases, and the effects of climate change.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced that it is moving Forest Service headquarters from Washington, DC, to Salt Lake City, Utah. In addition, the Forest Service would undergo an agency-wide reorganization by closing its nine regional offices and establishing 15 state offices in their place.

Altogether, this consolidation will result in the closure of 57 of the 81 Forest Service research stations spread from Alaska to Florida. It is unknown how many of the approximately 1,500 scientists the Forest Service now employs will be jettisoned.

“Scientific research is vital to the successful management of our nation’s forests,” stated PEER Western Lands and Rocky Mountain Advocate Chandra Rosenthal, noting USDA’s stated aim is to ‘give field leaders greater ability to respond to conditions on the ground’ without offering any examples of what this would mean. “Forest supervisors need scientific information to understand whether management actions are working or whether they are counterproductive.”

Notably, the Trump administration did not inventory the scientific research needs of the National Forest System before collapsing research capacity, a step many observers have long advocated for. As a result, PEER is raising concerns about:



PHOTO: USFS

Who Needs Research? Big cuts to Forest Service science come as the Trump administration seeks to substantially increase timber cuts amid increasing wildfire risk.

- Abandonment of research on the impacts of climate change in forest ecosystems;
- Reduced peer-reviewed research into effective forest management techniques; and
- A one-size-fits-all approach to forest management across vastly different forest systems, from the rainy hardwood forests of the East to the arid brush forests of the Southwest.

“Not all forests are the same, but the Forest Service is weakening its ability to understand forest diversity by eliminating almost 60 specialized research stations looking at local forest conditions,” Rosenthal added. “Given the increased demands placed on our national forests, this seems to be an especially imprudent time to cripple the agency’s research capacity.”

Another HQ Move Outside the Beltway

During his first term, Trump moved the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) headquarters from DC to Grand Junction, Colorado, even though 95% of BLM employees already worked in other, primarily western, states.

The Biden administration reversed the move because fewer than 50 of the expected 325 employees actually made the move. The Trump I relocation had isolated BLM’s leadership while adding travel expenses. Under Trump II, more

BLM headquarters employees will again be moved to Grand Junction.

Meanwhile, undeterred by the Trump I move of USDA’s Economic Research Service to Kansas City, where more than half the staff resigned and work ground to a halt, Trump II has announced plans to move more than half of USDA’s 4,000-person workforce outside the Beltway.

The USDA’s Forest Service already houses its administration services in

Albuquerque, New Mexico. Moving its small HQ staff to Utah bodes a repeat of the disruptive BLM experience.

Absent from these relocation tallies, there is no evidence that agency performance or responsiveness has or will improve due to the move; instead, there is ample evidence to the contrary. Its true intent appears to be to reshape Forest Service culture by shrinking the size of the agency and isolating agency experts from where policy decisions are made.



ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

EPA's Allergy Against Regulating Microplastics

Each year, the average person consumes 40,000 or more microplastic particles from drinking water. A recent study found microplastics in over 90% of tap water and in single-use bottled water.

These plastic particles accumulate in organs and tissues such as the brain, heart, lungs, testicles, and arterial plaques, as well as in urine, breastmilk, semen, and even the placenta. They are linked to immune disruption, reproductive and cardiovascular disorders, neurotoxicity, and cancer risks. Despite this, microplastics are completely unregulated.

Reducing microplastics in our diet is a major goal of the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) movement, associated with Department of Health and Human Services Secretary RFK, Jr. However, MAHA advocates have been frustrated because Trump's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has taken several industry-friendly stances on issues ranging from pesticides to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Reflecting MAHA pressure, EPA just added

microplastics, pharmaceuticals, and other chemicals to its so-called Contaminant Candidate List (CCL) under the Safe Drinking Water Act, hailing the action as "dramatic" and "bold." But, in fact, it is neither.

Placement on the CCL provides no assurance that the chemical will ever be regulated. Over the past 20 years, EPA has set drinking water regulations for only a handful of the scores of chemicals on the list.

Even that tiny set of added regulations has been rolled back during both of Trump's terms. For example, in 1998, EPA finally added perchlorate, a toxin used in rocket fuel and fireworks linked to brain damage in infants, to the CCL. In 2011, EPA decided to regulate perchlorate. Then in 2020, Trump's EPA withdrew that decision before a drinking water standard could be set. Fortunately, a federal appeals court overturned this rollback, but EPA has until mid-2027 to finalize a maximum contaminant level for perchlorate.

Similarly, last year, EPA announced that



PHOTO: ADOBESTOCK PHOSCAR

Little Things Add Up. Microplastics are shards of plastic smaller than 5 millimeters. Adults can ingest the equivalent of one credit card per week in microplastics.

it would withdraw limits on four of the six forms of PFAS in drinking water set under Biden.

In short, placement on the CCL is a welcome first step toward ultimate regulation, but few chemicals ever move to the next level in a process that takes years. Meanwhile, microplastics will be increasingly present in American diets to our detriment.

Protecting Farmers and Food Supply from PFAS

A new PEER-funded study shows toxic forever chemicals known as PFAS are entering the food chain on Long Island through contaminated soil, water, and air. The study conducted by Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Stony Brook University, and PEER in August 2025 analyzed a total of 23 items of produce from six conventional farms that use pesticides and two organic farms. The produce included carrots, romaine lettuce, Boston lettuce, and beets. Testing revealed high levels of PFAS, which are linked to cancers

and other serious health risks, such as increased cholesterol, decreased immune response to vaccines, liver enzyme changes, and reduced infant birth weights.

EPA's inaction on PFAS is harming farmers and consumers throughout the country. "PFAS are in our soil, they're in our rain, they're in our groundwater," says Dr. Kyla Bennett, PEER's director of science policy.

PEER has been leading efforts to remove PFAS from plastics and



PHOTO: ADOBESTOCK JAIRONZ

Not About Farmers. PFAS have become ubiquitous in our environment and food.

pesticides and to regulate the amount of PFAS allowed in sewage sludge used as fertilizers.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Americans Want Protections from Toxic Chemicals—The Industry Has Other Ideas

With the Trump administration back in power, the chemical industry has gained unprecedented control over the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s review of chemicals for unreasonable risks to public health and the environment.

With this expanded power, the chemical industry and many in Congress continue pushing to further weaken federal regulation of toxic chemicals and undermine the states' ability to pass laws protecting their residents when the federal government fails to do so.

These efforts run counter to the wishes of many Americans. According to a new survey by The Pew Charitable Trusts, more than 70% of American adults are very or somewhat concerned about exposure to toxic chemicals via food and drinking water, and five out of six adults said they want the federal government and industry to do more to protect them.

A Simple Idea for Reform

PEER has a simple reform idea that will make the review process much easier and more efficient while leading to better results.

The chemical industry is demanding changes to the Toxic Substances Control Act, which they allege will accelerate the approval and sale of chemicals. It blames EPA for slow, inefficient reviews that hinder innovation and create regulatory backlogs.

But the problem is not the law, or the EPA scientists conducting chemical assessments.

The problem is that the industry is not required to provide EPA with all the data necessary to conduct a risk assessment. At times, chemical companies provide EPA scientists with just a chemical structure and an industry-sponsored study on why the chemical is safe. This lack of industry



PHOTOS: ADOBESTOCK, SVED OLIVER

Chemicals of Concern. Tens of thousands of chemicals have yet to be seriously screened for ultra-hazardous applications.

data slows EPA's assessments by forcing scientists to chase down data they need, resulting in delays and, ultimately, backlogs of chemical assessments.

If industry were required to provide EPA with a minimum dataset, risk assessments would be faster, more predictable, and more accurate. This change is something the industry will oppose, but it is a good idea for everyone else.

Climate Change: Why Action Matters More Than Ever

U.S. climate policy is in tatters after a year of civil servant purges and relentless attacks on environmental policies, programs, and funding mechanisms.

In March, PEER and the Environmental Protection Network (EPN) held a webinar on what we all can do to counter attacks on climate programs and build a future that recognizes the federal government's important role in addressing the climate crisis.

PEER Science Policy Director Kyla Bennett shared an overview of the latest climate science, noting that climate change is accelerating much

more rapidly than expected. She also emphasized that climate change is a symptom of humans using too many of the planet's finite resources—and that because of this, addressing the climate crisis requires much more than just decarbonizing our economy.

Joseph Goffman, former Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, spoke about EPA's "endangerment finding," a landmark scientific and regulatory determination that laid the foundation for significantly reducing carbon emissions and providing tremendous financial benefits to the

U.S. economy. The Trump administration is working to revoke the "endangerment finding" based on faulty science.

Other speakers included PEER Executive Director Tim Whitehouse, who spoke about why governance matters in our climate fight, and EPN's Senior Director of Policy Peter Murchie.

Scan the QR code to watch the webinar recording or visit peer.org/climate-webinar-2026





FREE SPEECH

EPA Targets Employees' Free Speech Rights

As reported in the last issue of PEERreview, PEER is pursuing First Amendment and whistleblower challenges against the dismissal of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) employees. The employees were fired for signing a public letter of dissent protesting the politicization of EPA science and recent agency actions that endanger public health and the environment.

Internal Emails Disclosed

Since filing these actions, internal emails obtained by *E&E News* reveal that EPA ethics and legal officials explicitly warned leadership not to take retaliatory action against employees who signed the letter. The officials noted that the employees were likely engaging in protected speech under the First Amendment and that any disciplinary action would carry “significant legal risk.”

That advice was disregarded by leadership just one day later.

“Federal employees have the right to speak out on matters of public concern in their personal capacities, even when they do so in dissent,” said PEER General Counsel Joanna Citron Day, noting that legal experts have long held public employees do not forfeit their First Amendment rights, particularly when speaking as private citizens on matters of public concern.

Zeldin's Unsubstantiated Attacks

The stated basis for EPA's action against employees who signed the letter was “conduct unbecoming a federal employee,” claiming they made unsupported statements disparaging the agency. Yet, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin did exactly that by claiming he found widespread absenteeism and ghost employees at EPA.

Months after PEER filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request asking for the basis of Zeldin's claims, we have yet to



PHOTO: ABOBESTOCK/AFISHMAN64

Free Speech Has Costs. PEER is representing EPA employees fired for signing a letter of protest.

get an answer, leading PEER to sue EPA under FOIA. Not surprisingly, we suspect the documents supporting Zeldin's claims do not exist.

Authoritarian Slide

The Trump administration's stamping out of free speech and whistleblower rights while debasing and criticizing public employees is part of the slide toward authoritarianism in this country.

Public servants are well-informed about government activities—they have crucial information that the public deserves to know about. If these firings are upheld, the administration will have another tool to silence public employees at a time when public discourse is so important.

Free Speech Fracas at Yosemite

The National Park Service fired Dr. Shannon “SJ” Joslin, a ranger and biologist at Yosemite National Park, for their role in briefly flying a trans pride flag from El Capitan and then, in a significant escalation, requested criminal prosecution. For decades, climbers at Yosemite have expressed messages—political and non-political—from this iconic rock formation, but there is no record of anyone ever

being punished for doing so, let alone fired or criminally charged.

On Dr. Joslin's behalf, PEER and the Civil Service Law Center have filed suit, citing their First Amendment and Privacy Act rights and seeking a preliminary injunction for reinstatement and enjoining criminal enforcement.

“This administration is targeting Dr. Joslin because it wants to scare people into silence,” stated PEER General Counsel Joanna Citron Day, a former U.S. Justice Department attorney. “Dr. Joslin exercised their First Amendment rights and is being illegally punished to send a clear message—speech the administration doesn't like will not be tolerated.”

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Yellowstone's Toxic Employee Housing

PEER is working with current and former employees of Yellowstone National Park to address and remedy unsafe employee housing in the park stemming from lead-based paint. Unabated lead paint in park housing puts families with young children at particular risk. One family has a pending lawsuit over their two young children suffering from lead poisoning.

We are focusing on the park's failure to notify current and past residents of lead dangers. In addition, park officials have approved improper, unsafe paint removals, which can aggravate lead exposure. Beyond structures, Yellowstone has systemically ignored dangerously high lead levels in the soil, especially in play areas surrounding houses.

Yellowstone is the world's oldest national park. Many of the homes for employees were built before 1900, and most others were built well before 1978, which carries with it a presumption of the presence of lead-based paint. Park officials acknowledge that around 290 historic residences contain lead-based paint. Many of these structures still

house employees and their families.

A 2021 review prepared for Yellowstone found that lead in paint was detected above U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lead safety levels in most of the housing units reviewed. Since this 2021 inspection report, only a few of these buildings have been safely rehabilitated. More recently, the National Park Service completed a 2025 Lead Hazard Compliance Review of Yellowstone in response to employee complaints, which concluded, among other things, that:

- "Evaluating and mitigating exposure risks, especially for vulnerable populations, is a regulatory imperative unmet at [Yellowstone]."
- "Yellowstone's housing office was unaware of their own Housing Management Plan and was unable to answer to crucial elements of managing health hazards in Government Furnished Housing."
- "Only 21.1% of park housing was in full compliance with Family Housing Lead policies, a number that underscores significant gaps in



PHOTO: NPS EMPLOYEE

Putting Families at Risk. Many of Yellowstone's employee housing units are in deplorable condition.

execution beyond policy, particularly in housing management."

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Lead Safe Housing Rule has been in effect since 2000. "Yellowstone management has long known about these dangerous conditions but has yet to make them a priority," stated PEER's Western Lands and Rocky Mountain Advocate Chandra Rosenthal. "A private landlord offering housing under these conditions risks jail time; if anything, federal landlords should be held to a higher standard."

Bear Baiting Is Back

The Trump administration wants to resurrect a particularly barbaric practice across more than 22 million acres of National Park Service-administered land in Alaska: using bait to hunt bears. The practice had been outlawed as both unsporting and potentially dangerous because habituating bears to food can have unfortunate results.

This is one of about a dozen rule changes pushed under Trump II, which disadvantages park wildlife. While hunting is allowed in park preserves, it is not allowed within national parks, such as Denali and Glacier Bay. But, as PEER is documenting, excessive hunting in adjacent preserves often depletes wildlife populations within the parks themselves.



PHOTO: ADOBESTOCK EMMATS

The Lure of Glazed Donuts. Bear baiting is banned on all national wildlife refuges and in two-thirds of states, which allow bear hunting.



PEER PERSPECTIVES

“Excursions”



Interior Secretary Doug Burgum

In a social media post, Burgum introduced a new cartoon mascot named “Coalie,” a black, lumpy character wearing a hard hat, boots, and a vest bearing the letters OSM (the acronym for the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, the agency overseeing coal strip-mining). Coalie is the ambassador for Trump’s energy dominance agenda, carrying the slogan “Mine, Baby, Mine!” At the same time, the Trump administration is sidelining protections to limit miners’ exposure to toxic silica dust. Perhaps Coalie will soon be joined in Burgum’s communications shop by a new cartoon sidekick—meet “Black Lungie.”



Bureau of Safety & Environmental Enforcement Alaska Director Justin Miller

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) was created to oversee inspections and enforce regulations for oil rigs in the wake of the BP Gulf oil spill. Miller has headed BSEE’s Alaska office since 2022. President Trump now wants a big increase in Alaskan oil and gas production. After the administration proposed holding dozens of new lease sales in Alaskan waters, Miller submitted a public comment on this proposal, warning that staff cuts made by Elon Musk’s so-called Department of Government Efficiency had left BSEE dangerously understaffed and suffering from the “loss of many decades worth of experience,” which will not be replaced. After his comment received media attention, Miller was placed on an “extended leave.” Fortunately, Trump’s first offshore lease sale in Alaska received zero bids.



U.S. Senator Tim Sheehy

Before being elected to office, Sheehy made a fortune with his company, Bridger Aerospace, an aerial firefighting company that he bragged was “fighting on the front lines of climate change.” He also installed rooftop solar and battery storage systems at his Bozeman home when federal tax law enabled homeowners to recoup 26% of the project’s costs. That was then. Now, Sheehy criticizes “goofy, subsidized green energy crap” and voted for the Trump mega-bill, which ended solar tax credits. When asked about this dichotomy, Sheehy said, “It’s my personal home, so it’s not really any of your business” and declined to answer further questions, illustrating that people in solar-powered houses need not embrace sunny dispositions.



Interior Communications Director Katie Martin

In an agency-wide reorganization, Interior Secretary Burgum transferred all admin, IT, and communication staff from every Interior bureau into his office—absorbing some 5,000 positions and tripling its size. This means that all media communications for the Park Service and other Interior bureaus must now be cleared by the Interior Secretary’s office. SFGATE is the only national media operation with an entire bureau dedicated to covering national parks. However, it has been blacklisted by Interior, which declines to respond to any of its inquiries. While denying a formal blackball, Interior Communications Director Katie Martin complains, “Unfortunately, SFGATE has distorted the facts and has caused confusion with their reporting to the mainstream media.” Meanwhile, Park Service staff confirm they are indeed directed to ignore SFGATE requests because they aren’t “in line with the administration’s views,” according to internal emails. Thankfully, taxpayers pay the salaries of Martin and her minions to correct the facts and dispel media confusion.



Ex-Attorney General Pam Bondi

In one of her last official acts, Bondi proposed a federal regulation that would immunize Department of Justice (DOJ) lawyers from state bar discipline for lying in court or other unethical behavior. Never mind that the federal government has no jurisdiction over state bar societies. However, the idea that DOJ attorneys should be able to lie or engage in fraudulent behavior free from sanction is a telling sign of how corrupt the DOJ has become during her short, unlamented tenure.



Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche

Blanche announced that the DOJ will stop prosecuting people and companies that sell “defeat devices” to bypass vehicle pollution control systems. He is relying on an internal memo forwarding the screwy legal theory that defeat device violations cannot be prosecuted as crimes under the Clean Air Act but only as civil matters. This new DOJ policy will end more than a dozen prosecutions and 20 ongoing investigations. It is a full retreat from what had been a major enforcement area for both the Trump I and Biden administrations ever since the massive Volkswagen cheating scandal was uncovered. Offenders are invited to breathe in this new air of freedom but should be cautioned not to inhale too deeply.

WILDLIFE

Make a Difference—Help Protect Wildlife

The Trump administration has launched an unprecedented attack on American wildlife—attempting to gut some of the most successful programs in the country that protect threatened and endangered species.

- The “God Squad”—a group of senior Trump officials—voted to exempt oil and gas companies in the Gulf of Mexico from complying with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), a move that will likely drive the Rice’s whale and other species to extinction.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture has eliminated public participation for decisions related to wildlife-killing programs and environmental reviews for logging, mining, drilling, and road-building projects in national forests.
- The Department of the Interior (DOI) solicitor has opened the door for companies to kill migratory birds without liability, despite a 2020 federal court ruling.

- The DOI has proposed lifting a ban on bear baiting in federal preserves in Alaska.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed rescinding the current definition of “harm” in ESA regulations to exclude habitat modifications, despite habitat loss accounting for 80% of U.S. species population declines.

This administration is stripping wildlife protections daily under the guise of responding to manufactured emergencies. However, the true emergency is that without enforcement of wildlife protections, entire species will disappear.

PEER has launched a letter-writing campaign to let Congress know that these acts are unacceptable. Learn more about this campaign and why your voice will help make a difference on this important issue by visiting peer.org/wildlife-letter or scanning the QR code.



SUPPORTING PEER

Thinking About the Legacy We Leave

All of us at PEER are incredibly grateful for the growing support we’ve received from our donor community across the country. This newsletter is a testament to the incredible and difficult work we are undertaking together.

Thank you for continuing to engage in our work and for your support of public employees and the environment. We all know that for this work to succeed, there must be fundamental changes to the way our country is governed. It won’t happen overnight, but we are up for the challenge.

One way you can help secure this future is by leaving a legacy

gift to PEER through your will or trust. A legacy gift is a forward investment in the work and institutions that you hold near and dear. As always, you have ultimate control over your assets and can update your plans at any time.

A legacy gift of any size will make a huge impact on our work together and ensure that we can keep up the fight well into the future. We hope you will consider including PEER in your legacy plans.

Please visit peer.org/legacy to learn more about our Legacy Giving Program or reach out to Claire Turner, Development Manager, at (240) 247-0295.

We Thank You!

We would like to thank the 512 returning donors and 91 new donors who have supported us so far this year. Thank you to the following foundations for their support:

*Broad Reach Foundation
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Government Chaos Demands Congressional Oversight (continued from page 1)

making Congress the ultimate authority on government spending. Congressional committees must investigate these actions, demand transparency, and use all available tools to ensure that Congress reasserts the power of the purse.

Environmental Rollbacks

Public Lands: Our public lands are under attack. The workforce at the National Park Service has been decimated as leaders threaten to sell off national parks and privatize park functions. In addition, the administration is degrading our public lands by prioritizing fossil fuel development, extraction, and logging at the expense of conservation. The Department of the Interior and the Forest Service are limiting public input and environmental review of projects. Without robust oversight, irreversible damage to public lands and the erosion of environmental safeguards will continue.

Climate Change: Clean energy programs are being obliterated while giveaways to fossil fuel companies have become the norm. Meanwhile, EPA's effort to repeal the scientific and legal determination that underpins federal authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions will have wide-ranging and devastating impacts. Through hearings, investigations, and public accountability, congressional committees must ensure that the administration's war on climate programs is stopped and reversed.

Toxic Chemicals: EPA's actions on toxic chemicals are endangering the health of all Americans. The Trump administration has approved numerous pesticides and chemicals previously banned or significantly restricted—with little transparency or accountability—raising questions about the role of industry influence. Congress must examine EPA's efforts to ignore or alter scientific findings,

root out conflicts of interest at EPA, and demand that EPA work to protect all Americans, not just those industries with money and power.

Wildlife Protection: As our country's wildlife populations collapse, this administration shows no regard for wildlife or endangered species. Congress must also be part of the solution. Proper oversight will reveal the outsized influence of the fossil fuel industry and well-funded, non-traditional hunting and ranching interests in this escalating war on nature.

As President Trump builds a presidency based on his image alone, Congress must be part of ensuring we remain a nation of laws that values the environment and respects a merit-based civil service.

We are determined to help make that happen.