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## Unredacted Interior documents show Zinke's monuments review was a sham

BY RANDI SPIVAK, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 07/30/18 08:00 AM EDT

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke just got caught red-handed. Now there's proof that his review of national monuments was a sham.

New records show Zinke and the Trump administration concealed documents from the public that emphasized the value of protecting Utah's Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears national monuments. Trump then slashed more than 2 million acres from them.

First reported by the Washington Post, the documents show Zinke's top staff spent months weaving a fake narrative that touted the benefits of logging, grazing, drilling and mining on protected public lands, from Cascade-Siskiyou in Oregon to Katahdin Woods and Waters in Maine, while ignoring the benefits of national monuments.

They show Zinke's team dismissed data from his own Bureau of Land Management staff showing that monument protections had safeguarded archeological treasures and boosted tourism. Zinke ignored science, economics and millions of public comments on his way to implementing the largest rollback of public lands protections in the nation's history.

The internal documents confirm that the true motivation behind Trump and Zinke's unrelenting attacks on public lands is to reward mining, logging, fossil-fuel and livestock interests.

We knew from previous internal emails that oil and gas exploration was behind their decision to shrink Bears Ears. Other documents show uranium mining interests were involved, too.

Yet, Zinke denied it, repeatedly claiming that mining and drilling had nothing to do with Trump's orders to review national monuments and yank protections from them. He just wanted "everyone's voice to be heard."

Now we know it was not the truth. The fix was in. The results of Zinke's monument "review" were decided before it began.

And we only know this because Interior officials, responding to public records requests, accidentally released thousands of pages of unredacted emails and other documents.

So now we know.

During Zinke's so-called review, top staff wanted to know how much timber could be logged from Oregon's Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, and how quickly.

"Can we immediately harvest in the 15,000 acres of the Expansion Area (EA)? Can we immediately harvest in the 40,000 acres of the original monument designation?" deputy assistant secretary Katharine McGregor asked then-acting BLM director John Ruhs last July, a month before Zinke released his "review." Yes, Ruhs replied, immediately.

Now we know Zinke hid information about the benefits of protecting prehistoric sites and artifacts in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, as well as efforts to emphasize how much coal, fossil fuels and minerals could be exploited if protections for these landscapes were stripped away.

"More vandalism would have likely occurred without Monument designation," BLM staff wrote in its summary to the Interior officials. "Education, increased presence of staff and research and improved management likely led to the reduction in the numbers of sites looted and rock art panels defaced."

"Less archeological research would have occurred without the Monument Designation," the redacted portion of the summary continued. "Early GSENM efforts included initiating large, landscape surveys which recorded and documented hundreds of sites."

The newly revealed documents are a stunning window into Zinke's Interior Department and his complete abdication of environmental stewardship to appease corporate, extractive industries.

Zinke can no longer claim to care about this country's public lands and expect to be believed. This ends the charade.

Trump needs to reverse his disastrous proclamations, rescind Zinke's fake national monuments review, rebuke his Interior secretary and end this debacle.

*Randi Spivak is the public lands director at the Center for Biological Diversity, national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.6 million members and supporters dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places. The Center has joined with other conservation groups to stop the rollback of protections for Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments, filing lawsuits that attack the president's orders as an abuse of his authority under the Antiquities Act.*