

President Trump opens parks to coal mining, again - AvvoStories

Friday, September 22 2017, 9:17 AM



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POLITICS, BUSINESS, MONEY, NEWS

Sep 10, 2017

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The concept of mining for coal within a national park is troublesome for many. President Donald Trump, however, has done just that, making it easier for companies to mine for coal on federal lands, which could include national parks and wildlife refuges. What many don't realize, however, is that mining on those lands was already being done, per existing environmental law.

[Mining the parks](#)

“Presidential [Executive Order](#) on Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth,” dated March 28, starts uneventfully, affirming the national interest in clean, safe development of energy resources, ensuring “electricity is affordable, reliable, safe, secure, and clean” and that regulatory rules are not too burdensome.

But then, after a section stating that energy-related regulations need to be reviewed for unnecessary obstruction to energy production, there is this:

“The Secretary of the Interior shall take all steps necessary and appropriate to amend or withdraw Secretary’s [Order 3338](#) dated January 15, 2016 (Discretionary Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to Modernize the Federal Coal Program), and to lift any and all moratoria on Federal land coal leasing activities related to Order 3338. The Secretary shall commence Federal coal leasing activities consistent with all applicable laws and regulations.”

Ending the moratorium

In January 2016, the Obama administration created Order 3338 to [call a halt](#) for three years on new coal mining on public land, pending a review of the environmental and public health impacts of coal production.

At the time, it was estimated that 20 years’ worth of coal production was already under way on public lands. Those existing mining operations were not affected by the moratorium, and so mining continued even after the order was issued. Still, some 50 pending leases for coal production were put in limbo.

The review was to have been completed by 2019, when the moratorium would either be lifted or made permanent based on its results. Under the terms of the executive order, that review, which had only completed scoping in January, will not be completed, and the secretary of the interior has [already opened](#) the parks for coal business.

Lowering standards

Coal mining in national parks has grabbed most of the attention, but this executive order does much more than open park land to [mining leases](#). The order:

- Rescinds four significant presidential climate- and energy-related regulations without the review normally required
- Revokes Obama-era reports and plans for dealing with [climate change](#), requiring agencies to use instead climate change data from 2003
- Requires a review and suggests rescission of federal rules on emission guidelines for power plants, including the [Clean Power Plan](#), a key regulatory action to lower greenhouse gas emissions in the electric power sector
- Requires a review and suggests rescission of emissions regulations for energy production from oil and natural gas

Many see the elimination of emissions standards for oil and natural gas as a far greater driver of [environmental and economic damage](#), although coal industry advocates and proponents of government deregulation disagree. But for now, it seems, the visceral thought of hiking past mine shafts along with the usual lakes and wildflowers will be the primary topic of conversation.

Tagged [Donald Trump](#), [Environment](#)

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