

MOVE OVER, BRUCE BABBITT: UNMASKING KEN SALAZAR'S INTERIOR DEPARTMENT AGENDA

Words and photo by Dave Skinner.

Many westerners remember the dark-of-night, or full-daylight, up-your-nose designation of new national monuments by President Clinton. Sold on building an environmental “legacy” by his Interior secretary, Bruce Babbitt, Clinton began by declaring the 1.9 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah—although he did it from across the Grand Canyon in Arizona. Clinton (and Babbitt) eventually used the 1906 Antiquities Act to newly designate or add to 21 national monuments, totaling about 5.9 million acres.

President Obama selected Sen. Ken Salazar (D-CO) as his secretary of Interior, ostensibly a rancher (he has the hat, of course), a real westerner, a moderate. But Obama’s new administration contains enough Clinton administration retreads and “fresh Greens” that savvy westerners felt another orgy of monument designations was possible. They were right.

In early February 2010, a seven-page “Internal Draft—NOT FOR RELEASE” leaked out into the real world. The draft was pages 15 through 21 of “attachments” to a larger, and still undisclosed, policy document within the Interior Department, covering the specifics of a so-called Treasured Landscapes (TL) Initiative of adding to the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS), initiated by Babbitt.

Attachment 4 lists a total of 13 possible new monuments or expansions; Attachment 5 lists three areas that might be protected through administrative planning fiat; and Attachment 6 covers seven “consolidation” proposals that would involve systematic purchases of private property. The attachments cover about 13 million acres of possible monuments or other set-asides in 11 western states—twice what Clinton took.

Needless to say, a lot of western elected

officials were a bit upset. Led by Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT), Western Caucus members wrote Interior, demanding to see the paper trail leading not only to creation of the attachments, but also the host document. Grudgingly, on May 4, Interior released only 383 pages of over 2,389 pages related to TL and posted to Rep. Dennis Rehberg’s (R-MT) website: rehberg.house.gov/uploads/DeptofInterior.zip.

The files are a glowing example of Obama administration “transparency.” Not a single new page of the leaked draft, either the first 14 pages or any following page 21, was forthcoming. Many items have “redacted” or blacked-out addresses and sentences. Others are copies of copies. There are only a couple of maps, produced by environmental groups that obviously hope to have their projects funded, or “their” monuments designated. Nevertheless, on May 5, the House Natural Resources Committee, chaired by Nick Joe Rahall (D-WV), stonewalled Bishop’s effort to have a formal “resolution of inquiry” passed to have the full Treasured Landscapes record released, voting 22-20 against. On May

20, Bishop and Doc Hastings (R-WA) turned around and introduced another resolution demanding within 14 days, “the document containing ‘Attachment

4 Prospective Conservation Designation: National Monument Designations under the Antiquities Act’ and marked ‘Internal Draft—NOT FOR RELEASE,’ including that document in full, all attachments in full, and all iterations of that document, and related similar documents.”

At press time, Congress hasn’t passed Bishop’s resolution, and likely won’t. But what has been revealed is useful in terms of timeline and identification of the players—which in turn goes a long way toward determining their intentions.

For example, on March 3, shortly after the

“We have been celebrating and pushing our treasured-landscapes agenda.”

—KEN SALAZAR



leak, Secretary Salazar went before the Senate Energy Committee, where he was asked about the draft. He told the senators, “There’s no hidden agenda on the part of my department” regarding prospective monuments. Furthermore, Secretary Salazar told Sen. Bob Bennett (R-UT) that “there is no direction from the White House on any of this to [Interior]. Zero. Nada. Nothing.” Bennett responded by saying he believed Salazar, which might explain why he just lost his primary election race in Utah.

Was Salazar being truthful? Well, on Aug. 13, 2009, Salazar sent a message to his “DOI_Politicals” list (see sidebar, page 50) telling how, over the course of a sweep through Wisconsin, Minnesota, Montana, Utah and Colorado, “We have been celebrating and pushing our treasured-landscapes agenda.”

Treasured Landscapes

The Treasured Landscapes Initiative is no secret, after all. The Interior Department proudly hosts a Treasured Landscapes Departmental Highlights Report on its website. A critical part of the TL agenda is to buy lots of land—which may have a greater impact than plain old monument designations. The money is to come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund



(LWCF), a 40-year-old program supported by revenues from outer-continental-shelf petroleum operations. Environmental groups have always viewed LWCF funds (up to \$900 million per year) as their private entitlement, but have rarely seen full funding—only in two of the past 40 years has Congress appropriated the whole pot. But Highlights notes that LWCF funding was increased 58 percent for 2010 from 2009 levels and will increase another 29 percent in 2011, to \$619.2 million. Furthermore, “appropriations from the LWCF are on track to reach [full funding] starting in 2014,” depending on how cooperative Congress will be.

The Federal Land Acquisition line item for buying “important properties” from “willing sellers” for Interior increases to \$310.4 million in 2011, up from a measly \$214.4 million in 2010, while Department of Agriculture funding for outright acquisition is expected to reach \$73.7 million in 2011.

One small irony worth noting in Highlights: One of the monuments Teddy Roosevelt designated during his tenure was the Petrified Forest in Arizona, which is now a national park. Sure enough, the National Park Service is now seeking \$7.5 million “to complete acquisition of Twin Buttes Ranch and

acquire the Paulsell Ranch” within the park, 35,960 acres.

Directions

As for direction from the White House, another DOI_Politicals message dated Sept. 25, 2009, clears the air: Salazar chief of staff Tom Strickland wrote the Politicals that “[t]he

A critical part of the TL “agenda” is to buy lots of land—which may have a greater impact than plain old monument designations.

Secretary has asked the Directors of the National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide their vision for their treasured-landscapes agenda for the next 10 years. As part of that presentation, he has asked that each Assistant Secretary, working with the Agency Director, provide an overview of...ideas for the creation of new national parks and/or monuments [and] also lay out specific proposals....”

The direction here appears to be Salazar’s, in the same way that Secretary Babbitt took it upon himself to convince President Clinton

Montana’s Phillips County, like the rest of the region, is grand yet hard country, not for everyone. In fact, it’s for darn few. Environmentalists seem to think it’s a treasured landscape only for them, but folks who live there treasure it, too.

to build an environmental legacy—but Salazar is not alone. Not only can he rely on his DOI_Politicals, but also on plenty of environmentalists eager to have LWCF money showered on their “treasured landscapes.”

In on the Secret

The released files show Treasured Landscapes had been well underway prior to July 2009, and was common knowledge to both agency heads and environmental groups, despite messages such as one by Will Shafroth to Ned Farquhar warning, “Please do not share this [draft].”

The depth of cooperation among insiders is clarified by an Aug. 4-19 message series from and to Gina DeFerrari, Northern Great Plains program senior policy adviser of the World Wildlife Fund, requesting a meeting with Ned Farquhar: It refers to WWF’s “land trust partner” American Prairie Foundation and its “vision of creating a large prairie-based wildlife reserve” between Canada’s Grasslands National Park and the C.M. Russell Wildlife Refuge in Montana. This message included maps.

On Aug. 31, WWF’s Martha Kauffman wrote to Shafroth assistant Nate Hundt explaining that the Badlands/Conata Basin in southwest South Dakota had been identified by WWF and others as “one of the priority landscapes” of the northern Great Plains.

Kauffman mentioned several—the APF scheme above, plus, she added, the Buffalo Gap grassland, Badlands National Park, and “remaining private lands held in conservation ownership”— that would be integrated into a “large conservation reserve” sufficient for an “ecologically functional bison herd” for \$23.5 million. This goes along with Bitter Creek, northwest of Glasgow, which has a conservation priority for not only WWF, but The Nature Conservancy, the Wilderness Society, plus the “Sierra Club, which was actively involved in the ACEC designation on the BLM lands” in Bitter Creek. (ACECs are Areas of Critical Environmental Concern—in essence, a restrictive administrative designation that is for most purposes equivalent to wilderness.)

Together, the combined “seamlessly managed” result would be “a multimillion-acre complex...anchored by the [CMR refuge] and



A map like this was attached to World Wildlife Fund communications with the Interior Department. WWF has many more like it (Google “Ocean of Grass”). WWF’s epic vision lacks only one component—money, and that is the political ability to claim yours. The Ocean of Grass/Big Open is one of more than a dozen “Treasured Landscapes” proposals that survived the first round of Interior’s secret vetting.

Grasslands National Park,” becoming the “largest, unfragmented” landscape where “large ungulates would migrate freely.” The price? Fifteen million dollars or so for Bitter Creek. For 3.5-million-acre Big Open? “Premature to assign cost...could range from \$30M to \$300M.”

Then there was the Aug. 25 message from Brownie Carson of the Natural Resources Council of Maine to Farquhar about their “fabulous project” to protect 4.5 million acres in Maine. Not asking for much at all.

Using this input, the Interior “politicals” were drafting a “vision document,” in turn presented to Secretary Salazar on Oct. 2, 2009. On Oct. 15, Sylvia Baca wrote, “I am doing treasured landscapes now, not Ned [Farquhar].” Later that month, a revised working version of the TL vision was circulated among Abbey, Baca and others. The revisions, and subsequent changes, were made by William D. Falsey, special assistant to Director Abbey. The level of dedication Mr. Falsey has to his assignment might be revealed by a sidebar in a message chain dated Nov. 11. Falsey wrote that he found the World Wilderness Congress then underway as “more than I envisioned,” and “quite inspirational,” which explains the purple prose in the leaked Internal Draft.

The private sector was obviously kept informed of the DOI_Politicals work. By mid-November 2009, Leslie Jones of the Wilderness Society requested “meeting on BLM treasured-landscapes ideas” in greater

THE DOI POLITICALS

Before exposing the agenda, it’s important to know the “politicals” appointed by President Obama and Secretary Salazar. The released papers show that all the following originated or received Treasured Landscape documents:

Robert V. Abbey, director, Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Abbey retired as BLM’s Nevada state director in 2005. In retirement, he joined the board of directors of Friends of Nevada Wilderness, and is featured by environmental group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility as a charter member of PEER off-shoot Rangers for Responsible Recreation, which attacks motorized use as “off-road wreck-recreation.”

Sylvia V. Baca: From 1995 to 2000, Baca was appointed as assistant secretary for land and minerals management under then-Secretary Bruce Babbitt. During the Bush years, she worked for British Petroleum as a Health, Safety and Environment vice president, working on environmental initiatives regarding climate change and biodiversity, among others.

David Hayes, deputy secretary: Like Baca, a fellow Babbitt/Clinton Interior retread (three years as Babbitt’s deputy secretary; same job under Salazar). Hayes was a lobbyist for San Diego Gas & Electric Company for at least part of the interim. At the time Obama appointed Hayes, he was vice chairman of American Rivers, a World Wildlife Fund senior fellow, and partner at the Latham Watkins law firm. Federal Elections Commission records show Hayes has also donated over \$23,000 to Democratic candidates and environmental causes (including Defenders of Wildlife) since 2001.

Wilma A. Lewis, assistant secretary for land and minerals management: Lewis most recently was a top lawyer for Freddie Mac, but had a stint from 1995 to 1998 as Interior’s first black inspector general.

Thomas Strickland, chief of staff to Secretary Salazar, assistant secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks: A millionaire Colorado attorney, longtime friend to Ken Salazar, former U.S. attorney, and twice-failed U.S. Senate Democratic candidate, Strickland’s “crowning achievement” (his words) is helping to create the lottery-supported Great Outdoors Colorado

“open space” program of parks and conservation easements, and calls Treasured Landscapes “a Great Outdoors America, if you will.”

Michael J. Bean, counselor to the assistant secretary, FWP (Strickland): Bean was chairman of wildlife programs for Environmental Defense Fund from 1977 until his appointment, a director of Resources for the Future, and part-time director of Pew Trusts’ Fellows in Marine Conservation programs during the Clinton administration.

Will Shafroth, deputy assistant secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks (under Strickland): First executive director of the Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund, Land Trust Alliance board of directors, American Farmland Trust staff.

Nate Hundt (assistant to Shafroth): Graduated from Yale, went straight to Iowa to work on Barack Obama’s Iowa caucus campaign.

Ned Farquhar, deputy assistant secretary, Land and Minerals (apparently to Baca): Former aide to New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, was western-lands program officer for the Packard Foundation after a stint with the same title for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

detail with Farquhar and Baca. By no later than Nov. 13 were “treasured-landscape update[s] for the Secretary” being circulated for a meeting held Nov. 18, 2009. And on Nov. 24, WWF’s Gina DeFerrari wrote a follow-up note to Ned Farquhar reporting that WWF staff had met with Montana BLM state Director Gene Terland to discuss TL, the “discussion was quite positive,” and “reaction of his staff was one of excitement.”

In early January 2010, Michael Scott of the Hewlett Foundation (former executive director of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition) invited Ned Farquhar to make a presentation to the annual meeting of the Consultative Group on Biological Diversity at the new Pew Foundation offices in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 3. Clearly, the Treasured Landscape proposal was common knowledge in the larger environmentalist world by this time, and, as Scott wrote, “the foundations attending the meeting will find your insights valuable.” So it seems that by Feb. 2, at least 95 Department of Interior staff, plus a gazillion green environmentalists knew all about the Treasured Landscapes program, which was still being worked over by William Falsey and John G. Cossa. One mid-February version was sent out by Cossa under the subject header “Our favorite topic: Treasured Landscapes.”

Out With the Secret

Finally, in mid-February, someone leaked. To assess the damage, BLM career spokeswoman Celia Boddington requested a copy from Rep. Bishop’s office and reported to BLM Director Abbey on Feb. 18 that Bishop had “just two attachments from the bigger DOI document.” Boddington had worked directly on the TL document herself much earlier, as early as Oct. 26, when she sent revisions to Appendix 3 to Richard Cardinale and Cossa.

However, by late February, the National Association of Counties was requesting clarification of the TL proposal to a meeting of either its Western Interstate Region directors or Public Lands Steering Committee on March 6-7. This prompted an email from Richard Cardinale, assistant legislative counsel of Interior’s Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, stating that “we need to discuss Sylvia’s [Baca] talking points.” That was duly arranged.

What’s Really Going On?

Since the internal draft leaked, several western members of Congress have introduced legislation exempting their states from the Antiquities Act. Not one, of course, is expected to

pass. We can only wonder why these august personages made no serious attempt at general Antiquities Act reform after Clinton left office. But they didn’t, leaving their constituents wide open for President Obama and Secretary Salazar to designate monuments as they wish.

But that was then. Now, while most of the political noise-making has been over the Interior Department’s very strong desire to see new monument designations on existing federal property, Secretary Salazar’s Treasured Landscapes program contains a critical component that was denied Babbitt: money.

During the Clinton administration, Congress never appropriated the full Land and Water Conservation Fund entitlement. The current Congress appears fully willing to do so, with the extra money making an entirely new option possible: The coordinated, programmatic creation of reserves from formerly private ranch and forestlands, for consolidation with existing federal lands.

Can You Imagine?

Finally, and maybe most ominously, while the excitement is about Interior’s intentions, Treasured Landscapes also involves the

Department of Agriculture. A block of messages around Aug. 20, 2009, covering DOI-USDA Coordination includes one from Jay Jensen, U.S.D.A. deputy undersecretary over the Forest Service (a “political” from the moderate Council of Western State Foresters), stating that “Treasured Landscapes will crosscut both DOI and U.S.D.A.”

Just at press time, Treasured Landscapes went public, under the name America’s Great Outdoors Initiative, with three listening sessions held in Montana on workdays in two college towns, as well as in Ovando. Ovando is the center of Plum Creek/The Nature Conservancy’s multimillion-dollar federalization of formerly private forest in Montana. Attending were Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer, and both Montana U.S. senators, Max Baucus and Jon Tester. Furthermore, at the Bozeman session, reporter Daniel Person of the *Bozeman Chronicle* caught the vibe: “[S]cores of people agreed that the Land and Water Conservation Fund should be fully funded.” ■

Dave Skinner lives in Montana’s Flathead Valley. He says he doesn’t get over to visit his neighbors on the east side nearly often enough.

SHUT OUT

By Sierra Dawn Stoneberg-Holt, Ph.D.

We live on a Montana ranch founded by my great-grandparents and great-great-grandmother, located squarely in the Treasured Landscapes bison range blast radius.

Every year we bind sunlight, rain, and clean air into 75,000 pounds of healthy, grass-fed beef. We make our own power with sun and wind. We faithfully control noxious weeds and wildfires, provide and maintain an out-house for the visiting public, bury the leavings of those who can’t figure out how it works, conserve wildlife habitat, pick up litter, maintain public roads, and save lost recreationists. We support our county, state, and nation with our taxes.

Why does the administration want to turn this productive, wildlife-rich land into another overgrazed preserve? Why do they want to spend fossil fuels transporting unsustainable rainforest beef to feed Americans when we can provide food, wildlife, and recreation, and will pay them for the privilege?

On May 27, I was forwarded a press release distributed by the Montana Stockgrow-

ers about an administration listening session. The session was in five-and-a-half days, in three major urban centers, all 330 miles or more from the proposed bison range. Registration closed five hours and 41 minutes after the Stockgrowers’ “Sent” heading. Scheduling a meeting to conflict with Memorial Day plans is not a great hardship for ranchers, but putting it in the middle of the busy spring season is.

By May 29, 39 hours after the registration deadline, neighbors were struggling to organize a delegation. No one made it. Attendees at one session were reported to be “90 percent representing environmental interests.” Silence equals approval; but then, so does objection. A state wildlife official told one neighbor that his opinion didn’t matter: he was going to be gone like the Indians.

Overhearing a desperate discussion, my little girl asked, “Mommy, why do those people want us to not go home?” Later, I saw a press release by Rep. Rehberg complaining that a listening session shouldn’t have restricted entry. My in-box held a press release that was very like the first listening-session announcement. The most obvious difference was a sentence stating that registration was not mandatory. The meeting had concluded 10 hours before. ■