

**Nomination of David Bernhardt
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
March 28, 2019**

Mr. Bernhardt, do you value public comment on proposed Department of the Interior activities? How do you plan to weigh and incorporate public comments on the National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2019-2024?

Mr. Bernhardt, if there is Congressional opposition, opposition from a state's Governor and the State is under a federal offshore drilling moratorium until 2022, will you commit to removing that state from the National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program for 2019-2024?

Response: In formulating an Outer Continental Shelf leasing program, the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) requires the Secretary of the Interior, through the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, to set a schedule of proposed lease sales that indicates the size, timing, and location of leasing activity that “best meets national energy needs.” The OCSLA also specifically requires the Secretary to invite and consider comments from the Governors of any affected state. Comments from the public, governors, Members of Congress, tribes, and stakeholders are an integral part of Program development. The governing statute provides multiple opportunities for participation through public meetings, scoping meetings, and open houses. In addition, if confirmed, I will be happy to meet with governors, Members, and other interested parties affected by the development of offshore energy whether it be in the form of fossil fuels or renewable energy.

Question 9: North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery

Last year, former Secretary Zinke visited Washington state and on Friday March 22, 2018, former Secretary Zinke publicly stated his support for Grizzly Bear Restoration in North Cascades National Park and the surrounding ecosystem. A quote from former Secretary Zinke in a U.S. Department of the Interior press release stated:

“Restoring the grizzly bear to the North Cascades ecosystem is the American conservation ethic come to life,” said Secretary Zinke. ***“We are managing the land and the wildlife according to the best science and best practices. The loss of the grizzly bear in the North Cascades would disturb the ecosystem and rob the region of an icon. We are moving forward with plans to restore the bear to the North Cascades, continuing our commitment to conservation and living up to our responsibility as the premier stewards of our public land.”***

According to a poll conducted by Tulchin Research, found that 81% of those who were pulled agree that “the State of Washington should make every effort to help grizzly bears recover and prevent their disappearance.”

The Federal Government has invested over \$1 million dollars over four years in North Cascades Grizzly Recovery and the work is not complete.

Congressional Report language in the 2019 Consolidated Appropriations Act stated:

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The Conferees direct the Service to work with ranchers, conservation groups, local governments, and other local partners to reduce conflicts between grizzly bears and livestock. These efforts should draw upon lessons learned with the Wolf Livestock Loss Demonstration Program to improve conservation outcomes while limiting effects to agricultural producers. Not less than 30 days after the date of enactment of this Act, and for a duration of not less than 90 days, the Service and the National Park Service are directed to re-open the public comment period regarding the draft environmental impact statement with proposed alternatives for the restoration of grizzly bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem. Any member of the public in attendance at any of the associated public forums and wishing to voice their opinion must be afforded the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Bernhardt, can you describe at what stage is the current North Cascades Grizzly Bear Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

Response: The National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service held a public comment period on the draft EIS with proposed alternatives for the restoration of grizzly bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem in early 2017 and received over 126,000 comments. In accordance with the Congressional Report language, the two bureaus are preparing to reopen the comment period to allow additional opportunity for public input.

Mr. Bernhardt, when will the Department re-open the public comment period on the North Cascades Grizzly Bear EIS? Will the Department host additional public meetings? When and where will these public meetings occur?

Response: In accordance with the Congressional Report language, the National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service are preparing to reopen the comment period to allow additional opportunity for public input. I expect the notice to be published in the coming weeks, and for public meetings to be held shortly thereafter.

Mr. Bernhardt, following the additional public comment period, will the Department finalize the North Cascades Grizzly Bear EIS? What is the timeline for finalizing the EIS?

Response: Following the additional public comment period, the next steps for the National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service include review of comments received; preparation of a final EIS (which will include written responses to public comments); issuance of the final EIS; and issuance of a final Record of Decision. The timeline for that process will depend on the number of public comments received and the scope of those comments.

Mr. Bernhardt, do you support your predecessor's statement on the need to restore the grizzly bear in the North Cascades ecosystem?

Response: I believe that we all benefit from the conservation of the grizzly bear. In addition, any effort to introduce bears must fully address the impacts to people and communities from such efforts, including public safety.