

A Historically Bad Year for Public Lands Under President Trump

The Trump administration's attacks on parks and public lands broke records in 2025, but they also met intense public opposition.



As the year comes to a close, it is clear that the Trump administration made history on public lands for all the wrong reasons. President Donald Trump's actions this year to erase conservation protections for public lands have already shattered records set over the course of his first term, hewing closely to the wish lists of oil and gas industry power players and other special interests. These attacks on conservation protections were mirrored by unprecedented cuts to the staff and budgets dedicated to stewarding public lands across the United States.

Meanwhile, attacks on public lands have proven uniquely—if predictably—unpopular in 2025, prompting widespread backlash and opposition.

2025 public lands attacks are unprecedented

[Recent analysis](#) from the Center for American Progress found that already-initiated actions by the Trump administration would strip protections from nearly 88 million acres of public lands—the equivalent of [117 Yosemite national parks](#). The scope of these actions shatters [record lows](#) set over the course of President Trump's first term. In fact,

Trump remains the [only president](#) in U.S. history to have removed protections for more public lands than he has protected.

Notably, President Trump's year-one agenda for public lands hewed remarkably close to the special-interest wish lists prepared by the oil and gas industry and industry-aligned Project 2025 before he took office. As [CAP outlined in January](#), that checklist included offering massive oil and gas lease sales; weakening safeguards for drilling; targeting protections for the Boundary Waters, Chaco Canyon, and the Arctic; and erasing the Bureau of Land Management's Public Lands Rule.

At the same time, President Trump and the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) made [deep and harmful cuts](#) to public lands agencies. For example, about [24 percent of National Park Service employees](#) were fired, resigned, or otherwise departed in just the first half of 2025, with [further cuts already planned](#). The president's proposed budget for 2026 would go even further, [cutting public lands agency budgets](#) by more than one-third from 2024 levels; [robbing funds](#) from the nation's core conservation funding program, the popular and bipartisan Land and Water Conservation Fund; and even [transferring some national park units](#) out of federal ownership permanently. CAP [estimates](#) that Trump's budget proposal would reduce per-visitor spending for public lands agencies by nearly 55 percent from 2011 levels—after accounting for inflation.

Public lands attacks were uniquely unpopular in 2025

This summer, mass opposition [forced congressional Republicans](#) to remove from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act language that would have required the sale of public lands. Pushed by Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT), a [close Trump ally](#) and chairman of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, that portion of the bill would have [sold off more than 2 million acres of public lands](#) to help offset tax cuts. [National polling](#) shows deep opposition to selling public lands, and the Senate's proposal [met fierce opposition](#) across the political spectrum.

Additionally, the Trump administration's firings of park rangers and other public lands staff have prompted [widespread](#) and [bipartisan](#) concern. Faced with early backlash, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum backpedaled, [reversing course](#) on seasonal staffing cuts, [rehiring some fired employees](#), and [publicly promising to keep parks open](#) as workforce concerns piled up. Similarly, the U.S. Forest Service [backtracked on some of its firings](#) in February and, after pressuring staff to leave the agency, subsequently [asked resigned workers to return](#) to help during the wildfire season.

Attempts to remove conservation protections for public lands have also met strong opposition. Of more than 600,000 public comments on the Trump administration's proposal to rescind "roadless rule" protections for national forests, [more than 99 percent](#) were found to oppose the rollback of protections. Similar analysis found that [98 percent of public commenters](#) oppose the proposed rescission of the Public Lands Rule, a [cornerstone policy](#) guiding land conservation and restoration across nearly 250 million acres of public lands.

Sadly, as we look ahead to 2026, the Trump administration shows no signs of changing course on public lands. Earlier this month, the administration nominated Steve Pearce—a

former congressman with a [track record](#) of supporting public lands sell-offs and opposing national monuments, among other controversial positions—to lead the Bureau of Land Management. Meanwhile, despite public opposition, the Trump administration is plowing ahead with rollbacks, recently [opening sensitive wildlife habitat in America's Arctic](#) to oil drilling.

Even during the government shutdown, the Trump administration used limited resources to [prioritize new drilling](#) on public lands while leaving stewardship responsibilities neglected. In fact, [as CAP detailed in a recent analysis](#), the fate of public lands during the shutdown bears a striking resemblance to President Trump's long-term plan for public lands—from inadequate staffing and historic sites at risk to greater burdens forced onto states and Tribes.

Conclusion

Despite the Trump administration's alarming trajectory on public lands in 2025, the future is far from certain. As the defeat of public lands sell-off proposals in Congress showed, conservation can be a galvanizing issue. Protecting public lands [remains deeply popular](#), and more people than ever are demonstrating with their precious free time how much they value these lands. Visits to public lands and demand for outdoor recreation are [on the rise](#). In fact, [new analysis](#) estimates that recreation on federal public lands contributes \$351 million to the U.S. economy every day—put another way, that's the equivalent economic impact of hosting eight Super Bowls every month.

With more and more people seeking adventure and refuge in America's parks, a presidential agenda aimed at firing more rangers, gutting funding, erasing protection, and selling off public lands is deeply out of touch with what the American people want.