

## The New Administration: What's next

The three federal agencies or departments that are responsible for most of the environmental or conservation matters of the nation are Interior, Commerce and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Note that EPA is not a cabinet level department, which makes all the difference in the world, especially in Washington DC.

According to the New York Times, the following three people are under consideration for EPA Administrator: Myron Ebell, Robert E. Grady and Jeffery E. Holmstead (former EPA Admin under GW Bush). Grady worked on the Clean Air Act of 1990 and Ebell denies climate change and works for the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

After a presidential election, the change of administration in Washington always brings flux and change to the agencies at the regional and state level. We know of this flux because most of us have experienced it before. This change may be much more dramatic, and we won't know how much more until events unfold over the next few months. Even then, we may not know and understand the full scope of change until many months pass. Let's see what we do know. After talking with some of my colleagues and friends (and many are both), I have a better sense of the situation as it stands now.

First, regulatory agencies will keep doing the work of writing permits, and taking actions required by federal law. EPA and state agencies will issue and review air, water, waste disposal permits. The routine work goes on. Big decisions completed before the end of the year will be hard, if not impossible to stop or fundamentally alter. The Record of Decision documents signed earlier this year, or even this month will be implemented. Work will continue on the remedial action in Michigan's Pine River and DC's Spring Valley.

We can expect new actions, new initiatives and discretionary efforts will come to a halt, at least for a while. The new administrator or secretary will put his or her priorities into actions. Offices and programs that have been mandated by federal law cannot be dismantled, but may be unfunded. One example, during the Reagan administration, Congress had to restore funding for the Sea Grant program every year for 8 years. Reagan could not eliminate the program, but he tried to take away all the money to carry out the program. I anticipate seeing similar efforts in early 2017.

Some EPA programs turn out to be useful and effective, regardless of politics. Air, water and waste permits keep the system running. Cleaning up contamination is a good thing that benefits everyone, even if it's a long term payoff and there is a cost to some

parties. In NOAA, fishing vessels still need permits and flying under the radar or ignoring the requirements does not work unless dealers, buyers, retailers and enforcement offices also ignore the rules.

I expect that the new administration will put a halt to all things related to global climate change/warming and alternative energy. The incoming president doesn't get it, and some of his people do not either. Maybe, just maybe, the economists will show the other people, president included, that there is a substantial economic cost of global warming. Not until a few local officials convince the new administration that their cities or counties are already suffering will the new folks get the message. When all, and I mean all sectors of the fishing community, agricultural communities and others raise loud voices for an extended period will the Trump folks understand that climate change has already caused havoc. Trump's people, I predict, will ignore the threat and existing harm caused by a range of chemicals until bludgeoned by a host of facts. Given the president-elect's disdain for facts and scientific analysis, his people are the ones who have to be convinced to act. He won't.

At some point, the new administration will discover that the most effective way to stop or undo environmental protection and restoration is to be subversive in their approach. The attacks will take the form of reducing budgets and freezing hiring, thus doubling work loads and reducing the effectiveness of programs. New regulations will have to be accompanied by eliminating regulations at a ratio of 2 to 1 (Trump already floated this idea). And I expect to see some sort of cost-benefit threshold or risk analysis (recall the Government Performance and Results Act). Expect enforcement to be replaced by compliance assistance.

I have been reminding people that regulations save lives- on the factory floor, in the mine, on the highway. Food safety, clean air, and safe water all come from regulations. Whether it's lead poisoning, asthma, or food poisoning, regulations improve health. No less is true for wildlife, ecosystems and natural resources.

The incoming president has said that he will dismantle EPA, eliminate burdensome regulations, end alternative energy work, and halt climate change work. Over the years, I have come to believe my psychologist friends who tell me that "behavior is patterned and predictable." I do not expect Trump to be different as a president than he was as a candidate. I think he sees the environment as his enemy. On that basis, now is the time to raise our voices and take the actions we know how to take, as well as some new ones.

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