



# Trump trashes the natural world and calls it 'environmental leadership'

BY JOEL A. MINTZ, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 07/17/19 08:30 AM EDT  
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In a recent speech, President Trump touted what he described as “America’s environmental leadership” during his presidency. He claimed that over the past two-and-a-half years, his administration has been “a good steward of public land,” reduced emissions of greenhouse gases, and successfully promoted clean air and water.

His claims are Orwellian in scope and mendacity. Even the most cursory examination of the Trump administration’s environmental record reveals an appalling litany of irresponsible, anti-environmental actions.

On the existential issue of global climate change, Trump’s actions have made the United States anything but an environmental leader. His decision to abandon the Paris Agreement — a promising beginning to international action to curb greenhouse gas emissions — made the United States the only nation on the planet not currently committed to achieving the accord’s goals.

What progress we've made as a nation reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), has been achieved over Trump's opposition. Most U.S. cutbacks in greenhouse emissions are the result of city and state action and the climate-protective policies of the Obama administration.

The president has made a point of promoting coal, a notoriously dirty and deadly fuel that makes an outsized contribution to climate change. Instead of accepting the market reality that the coal industry is in rapid economic decline — and moving to promote policies that will create stable industries in coal mining regions and investing in job training programs for former miners — the Trump administration has rolled back sensible regulations that would structure an orderly transition from coal to natural gas and renewable energy at power plants. He has even proposed repealing regulations that would require automakers to cut back CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by building more fuel-efficient vehicles.

In fact, in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence, Trump refuses to acknowledge the reality of climate change. He has derided the connection between human activities and the growing climate crisis as a “hoax,” dismantled a number of well-functioning government climate change programs, reassigned or fired respected scientists, and appointed climate deniers with ties to polluting industries to key positions in EPA and other federal agencies. Is this U.S. leadership on climate change? Hardly.

His environmental failures run deeper. The Trump administration has also forfeited any claim to world leadership in abating water pollution. Trump appointees have converted EPA's once highly effective Clean Water Act enforcement program into an advisory and support group for states — a number of which lack the resources, expertise or political will to enforce water quality rules effectively. Trump's officials have also proposed reinterpreting the Clean Water Act to eliminate important protections for wetlands — which help control floods, filter pollutants, serve as bird rookeries, and provide nurseries for fish and other aquatic life.

His record is no better on the protection of natural resources and public lands. The administration has opened federal lands to mining and drilling on a vast scale. Trump has proposed offshore oil drilling along the East Coast and in the fragile Arctic, where spills are next to impossible to clean up. He lifted a moratorium on coal leases on public lands, weakened needed regulatory protections against massive offshore oil spills in the Gulf of

Mexico, threatened the integrity of the nation's National Monuments, and curtailed spending on America's treasured, yet troubled, national parks.

In George Orwell's prophetic novel, "1984" the totalitarian regime of Big Brother adopted the slogan "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength." Although the first six words of this fictional mantra appear more relevant to Trump's foreign and immigration policies than to his environmental misdeeds, Orwell's satirical suggestion that "ignorance is strength" is directly related to the president's outlandish claim to have established American environmental leadership.

In reality, largely based as it is on willful ignorance and inexcusable indifference, the Trump administration's anti-environmental policies have palpably weakened U.S. standing in the world and threatened our health and well-being.

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