



October 29, 2018

VIA EMAIL

Ryan Witt, FOIA Officer
Bureau of Land Management
Attn: FOIA Office (WO-640)
1849 C St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20240
BLM_WO_FOIA@blm.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Mr. Witt:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the Department of the Interior's (DOI) implementing regulations, 43 C.F.R. Part 2, American Oversight makes the following request for records from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

On December 4, 2017, President Trump announced his intention to significantly shrink two national monuments—Bears Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.¹ That decision took effect on February 2, 2018, although the president's authority to actually order such reductions remains the subject of ongoing litigation.² Soon thereafter, Canadian mining company Glacier Lake Resources acquired “a dozen mining claims totaling over 200 acres on lands within the boundaries of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument,” the approval of which, according to 23 senators, “would represent a betrayal of our promise to federal taxpayers to steward these lands.”³ American Oversight submits this request to shed light on extractive industries' claims on what recently were—or, pending the resolution of relevant litigation, perhaps still are—national monument lands.

¹ Richard Gonzales et al., *Trump Orders Largest National Monument Reduction in U.S. History*, NPR (Dec. 4, 2017, 5:14 AM), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/04/567803476/trump-dramatically-shrinks-2-utah-national-monuments>; Hannah Nordhaus, *What Trump's Shrinking of National Monuments Actually Means*, NAT'L GEOGRAPHIC, Feb. 2, 2018, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/12/trump-shrinks-bears-ears-grand-staircase-escalante-national-monuments/>.

² Jake Bullinger, *BLM Wants Grand Staircase-Escalante Open for Business*, OUTSIDE, Aug. 16, 2018, <https://www.outsideonline.com/2336921/grand-staircase-escalante-bears-ears-blm-plan>.

³ Letter to Secretary Ryan Zinke from Sen. Tom Udall et. al, Aug. 2, 2018, *available at* https://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/f/2/f2ecc792-7b1e-43e9-ad82-89e837d34bc4/AD6C9FE7420CFCE165B4F40BE45EC447.letter-to-zinke-on-glacier-lake-mining-in-gsenm-8.2.18.pdf.



Requested Records

American Oversight requests that BLM produce the following within twenty business days:

1. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, and calendar invitations) between or among any BLM political appointee and any employee or representative of Glacier Lake Resources (including but not limited to any email address ending in @glacierlake.ca), including Glacier Lake Resources CEO Satvir “Saf” Dhillon. Responsive records should include emails on which any representative of Glacier Lake Resources is copied (cc) or blind copied (bcc).

“Political appointee” should be understood as any person who is a Presidential Appointee with Senate Confirmation (PAS), a Presidential Appointee (PA), a Non-career SES, any Schedule C employees, or any persons hired under Temporary Non-career SES Appointments, Limited Term SES Appointments, or Temporary Transitional Schedule C Appointments.

2. All emails or email attachments sent or received by any BLM political appointee containing any of the words in Column A and any of the words in Column B:

Column A	Column B
“Staircase-Escalante” “Grand Staircase” “national monument” “Bears Ears” “Circle Cliff” “Colt Mesa” “Garfield County”	“Glacier Lake” Mine* Mining Claim* “Antiquities Act” “Utah Schools and Lands Exchange Act” USLEA “General Mining Act” GMA Copper Cobalt Nickel Zinc Molybdenum Acqui* GLR

Responsive records should include emails on which any custodian is copied (cc’d) or blind copied (bcc’d).

Please note that American Oversight is using the asterisk (*) to designate the standard use of “wildcards” in the search for responsive records. For example, a search for “separat*” would return all of the following: separate, separates, separated, separation, etc. If your

agency is unable to search for wildcards, please advise so that we may specifically include the variations that we would like searched.

“Political appointee” should be understood as any person who is a Presidential Appointee with Senate Confirmation (PAS), a Presidential Appointee (PA), a Non-career SES, any Schedule C employees, or any persons hired under Temporary Non-career SES Appointments, Limited Term SES Appointments, or Temporary Transitional Schedule C Appointments.

3. Records sufficient to identify any procedures, standards, guidance, policies, and rules with regard to issuing and/or approving mining claims within land designated as national monuments. This search should include any final legal guidance or analyses produced by BLM regarding the decision to approve new mining claims within national monument land.

Please provide responsive records from January 20, 2017, through the date on which the search is conducted.

In addition to the records requested above, American Oversight also requests records describing the processing of this request, including records sufficient to identify search terms used, locations and custodians searched, and any tracking sheets used to track the processing of this request. If your agency uses FOIA questionnaires or certifications completed by individual custodians or components to determine whether they possess responsive materials or to describe how they conducted searches, we also request any such records prepared in connection with the processing of this request.

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. In conducting your search, please understand the terms “record,” “document,” and “information” in their broadest sense, to include any written, typed, recorded, graphic, printed, or audio material of any kind. We seek records of any kind, including electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs, as well as letters, emails, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations or discussions. Our request includes any attachments to these records. **No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.**

Please search all records regarding agency business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.⁴ **It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain period of time; American Oversight has a right to records contained in those files even if material has not yet been**

⁴ See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, 827 F.3d 145, 149–50 (D.C. Cir. 2016); cf. *Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Kerry*, 844 F.3d 952, 955–56 (D.C. Cir. 2016).

moved to official systems or if officials have, through negligence or willfulness, failed to meet their obligations.⁵

In addition, please note that in conducting a “reasonable search” as required by law, you must employ the most up-to-date technologies and tools available, in addition to searches by individual custodians likely to have responsive information. Recent technology may have rendered your agency’s prior FOIA practices unreasonable. **In light of the government-wide requirements to manage information electronically by the end of 2016, it is no longer reasonable to rely exclusively on custodian-driven searches.⁶ Furthermore, agencies that have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies, now maintain emails in a form that is reasonably likely to be more complete than individual custodians’ files.** For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency’s archiving tools would capture that email under Capstone. Accordingly, American Oversight insists that your agency use the most up-to-date technologies to search for responsive information and take steps to ensure that the most complete repositories of information are searched. American Oversight is available to work with you to craft appropriate search terms. **However, custodian searches are still required; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.**

Under the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, agencies must adopt a presumption of disclosure, withholding information “only if . . . disclosure would harm an interest protected by an exemption” or “disclosure is prohibited by law.”⁷ If it is your position that any portion of the requested records is exempt from disclosure, American Oversight requests that you provide an index of those documents as required under *Vaughn v. Rosen*, 484 F.2d 820 (D.C. Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 415 U.S. 977 (1974). As you are aware, a *Vaughn* index must describe each document claimed as exempt with sufficient specificity “to permit a reasoned judgment as to whether the material is actually exempt under FOIA.”⁸ Moreover, the *Vaughn* index “must describe *each* document or portion thereof withheld, and for *each* withholding it must discuss the consequences of disclosing

⁵ See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016) (“The Government argues that because the agency had a policy requiring [the official] to forward all of his emails from his [personal] account to his business email, the [personal] account only contains duplicate agency records at best. Therefore, the Government claims that any hypothetical deletion of the [personal account] emails would still leave a copy of those records intact in [the official’s] work email. However, policies are rarely followed to perfection by anyone. At this stage of the case, the Court cannot assume that each and every work related email in the [personal] account was duplicated in [the official’s] work email account.” (citations omitted)).

⁶ Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/28/presidential-memorandum-managing-government-records>; Office of Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Office of the President, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments & Independent Agencies, “Managing Government Records Directive,” M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf>.

⁷ FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 § 2 (Pub. L. No. 114-185).

⁸ *Founding Church of Scientology v. Bell*, 603 F.2d 945, 949 (D.C. Cir. 1979).

the sought-after information.”⁹ Further, “the withholding agency must supply ‘a relatively detailed justification, specifically identifying the reasons why a particular exemption is relevant and correlating those claims with the particular part of a withheld document to which they apply.’”¹⁰

In the event some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records. If it is your position that a document contains non-exempt segments, but that those non-exempt segments are so dispersed throughout the document as to make segregation impossible, please state what portion of the document is non-exempt, and how the material is dispersed throughout the document.¹¹ Claims of nonsegregability must be made with the same degree of detail as required for claims of exemptions in a *Vaughn* index. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

You should institute a preservation hold on information responsive to this request. American Oversight intends to pursue all legal avenues to enforce its right of access under FOIA, including litigation if necessary. Accordingly, you are on notice that litigation is reasonably foreseeable.

To ensure that this request is properly construed, that searches are conducted in an adequate but efficient manner, and that extraneous costs are not incurred, American Oversight welcomes an opportunity to discuss its request with you before your agency undertakes a search or incurs search or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, we can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in electronic format by email or in PDF or TIF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being sent by mail to American Oversight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255, Washington, DC 20005. If it will accelerate release of responsive records to American Oversight, please also provide responsive material on a rolling basis.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and 43 CFR § 2.45(a), American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. The subject of this request concerns the operations of the federal government, and the disclosures will likely contribute to public understanding of those operations in a significant way.¹² Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.¹³

American Oversight requests a waiver of fees because disclosure of the requested information is “in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding” of the

⁹ *King v. U.S. Dep’t of Justice*, 830 F.2d 210, 223–24 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (emphases in original).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 224 (citing *Mead Data Central, Inc. v. U.S. Dep’t of the Air Force*, 566 F.2d 242, 251 (D.C. Cir. 1977)).

¹¹ *Mead Data Central*, 566 F.2d at 261.

¹² 43 CFR § 2.45(a)(1).

¹³ 43 CFR § 2.45(a)(2).

operations or activities of the federal government.¹⁴ The disclosure of the information sought will reveal the potential influence of at least one outside group on any decisions to allow mining in what were national monument lands, as well as the factors influencing such decisions. The American public has a great and common interest in preserving national monuments, and the government’s decision to purportedly cut down the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and allow mining on those lands is a matter of deep public concern.¹⁵ American Oversight submits this request to shed light on whether and to what extent the Trump administration plans to further attempt to shrink protected lands in favor of the interests of extractive industries. And, as described in more detail below, American Oversight “will disseminate the information to a reasonably broad audience of persons” through its social media accounts and its website.¹⁶

This request is primarily and fundamentally not for commercial purposes, but rather the primary interest is in public disclosure of responsive records. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight’s financial interest. American Oversight’s mission is to promote transparency in government, to educate the public about government activities, and to ensure the accountability of government officials. American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or other media. American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.¹⁷ American Oversight has demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content. For example, after receiving records regarding an ethics waiver received by a senior DOJ attorney,¹⁸ American Oversight promptly posted the records to its website and published an analysis of what the records reflected about DOJ’s process for ethics waivers.¹⁹ As another example, American Oversight has a project called “Audit the Wall,” where the organization is gathering and analyzing information and

¹⁴ 43 C.F.R. § 2.48(a)(1)-(4).

¹⁵ See, e.g., Associated Press, *Canadian Company Moves to Mine on Lands Cut from Grand Staircase-Escalante Monument*, ST. GEORGE NEWS, June 23, 2018, <https://www.stgeorgeutah.com/news/archive/2018/06/23/apc-canadian-company-moves-to-mine-on-lands-cut-from-monument>; Shannon van Sant, *Firm Prepares to Mine Land Previously Protected as a National Monument*, NPR (June 21, 2018, 6:31 AM), <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/21/622128554/firm-prepares-to-mine-land-previously-protected-as-a-national-monument>.

¹⁶ 43 C.F.R. § 2.48(a)(2)(iii)-(v).

¹⁷ American Oversight currently has approximately 11,900 page likes on Facebook and 45,600 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Oct. 29, 2018); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Oct. 29, 2018).

¹⁸ *DOJ Civil Division Response Noel Francisco Compliance*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>.

¹⁹ *Francisco & the Travel Ban: What We Learned from the DOJ Documents*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/francisco-the-travel-ban-what-we-learned-from-the-doj-documents>.

commenting on public releases of information related to the administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border.²⁰

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

Conclusion

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with BLM on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, have any questions, or foresee any problems in fully releasing the requested records, please contact Hart Wood at foia@americanoversight.org or 202.873.1743. Also, if American Oversight's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Austin R. Evers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Austin R. Evers
Executive Director
American Oversight

²⁰ *Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>.