

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke joined with U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) to argue that the best way to fix the national parks is by pillaging public lands for fossil fuels. Their CNN op-ed published Wednesday focuses on the \$11.6 billion repair backlog the parks face—"our parks are being loved to death," they write. They say revenue to address the infrastructure repairs can come through their proposed legislation, the National Park Restoration Act (S.2509). Lamar is the sponsor of the bipartisan legislation, which he introduced at the behest of Zinke, and as the Interior Department noted in a press release, it "follows the blueprint laid out in Secretary Zinke and President Trump's budget proposal, the Public Lands Infrastructure Fund."

As Zinke and Lamar lay out:

These revenues will come from energy leases on all onshore and offshore sources of energy production on federal land: oil, gas, coal, renewables, and alternative energy. The fund would receive 50 percent of onshore and offshore revenues from energy production on federal lands over expected amounts that are not already allocated to other purposes.

Environmental groups have long cautioned against fueling the climate crisis with fossil fuel extraction on public lands—production Zinke is pushing to make easier.

Responding to the joint op-ed, some on social media gave the Zinke-Alexander plan a resounding thumbs-down and pointed to the need to get off fossil fuels:

According to Randi Spivak, the public lands program director for the Center for Biological Diversity, "There appears to be no limit to the fossil fuel industry's appetite for extraction and the Trump administration's willingness to bend over backward for these polluting companies." She also noted an analysis (pdf) from her group that "shows there's been no meaningful environmental review, disclosure of harms, or public engagement regarding nearly 200,000 acres of public lands in six Western states scheduled to be auctioned off during the first half of 2018."

As for the \$18 billion the Zinke-pushed plan supposedly would generate, that's "a fantasy number," Aaron Weiss, media director for the Center for Western Priorities, told ThinkProgress. "The idea that you could spark a giant stampede of new production while oil prices are where they are today, it's just fantasy land."

Environmental groups including The Wilderness Society and National Parks Conservation Association say that the infrastructure proposal put forth by Democrats is a far better option.

In the Democrat proposal, wrote NPCA's Ani Kame'enui, "None of these construction and maintenance projects would be paid for at the expense of public lands and waters. Instead, this plan funds infrastructure work by rolling back some of the controversial corporate tax



Pillaging National Parks for Fossil Fuels Is How We'll Protect Them

cuts passed in December 2017. We don't need to sacrifice public lands and environmental protections to improve America's infrastructure."

Source: ecowatch