

Amid Pesticide Scandal, Senate Confirms David Bernhardt as Interior Secretary

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

Global Research, April 14, 2019

[Center for Biological Diversity](#) 11 April 2019

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [History](#)

*Despite an unfolding controversy over the suppression of scientific evidence of pesticide dangers, **David Bernhardt** was confirmed today to become the next secretary of the Interior. The final Senate vote, largely along party lines, was 56-41.*

The vote comes as **Sen. Ron Wyden** (D-Ore.) and eight other Democratic senators [seek an Inspector General investigation](#) into Bernhardt's efforts as deputy Interior secretary to scuttle a scientific review of harm to wildlife caused by chlorpyrifos and two other pesticides. The review concluded that these pesticides jeopardize the existence of more than 1,300 endangered species.

"Bernhardt will be even worse than Ryan Zinke. He's the perfect distillation of Trump's contempt for the natural world," said **Kierán Suckling**, executive director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "He has spent decades scheming to undercut protections for wildlife and public lands across the country. This puts him in the perfect position to turn those nightmarish dreams into reality."

Since the early 2000s, Bernhardt — a longtime lobbyist for polluting industries — has worked to undermine the effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act. As the top political lawyer in the Bush administration, he was the chief architect of that administration's attempt to weaken the Act's implementing regulations by allowing federal agencies to ignore the full spectrum of harms caused by development. Those regulations were [overturned by Congress](#) at the beginning of the Obama administration.

In 2018 Bernhardt led the Trump administration's [push to gut](#) even more of the Endangered Species Act's regulations. One set of regulatory changes would weaken the consultation process designed to prevent harm to endangered animals and their habitats from federal agency activities. A second set of changes would curtail the designation of critical habitat and weaken the listing process for imperiled species. A third regulation would gut nearly all protections for wildlife newly designated as "threatened" under the Act.

In March, under Bernhardt, the Interior Department finalized a plan to weaken protections for the endangered greater sage grouse. The imperiled bird will be pushed closer to extinction by the plan, which opens vast areas of sage grouse habitat in seven Western states to oil and gas drilling.

"Future generations will mourn the animals and plants that went extinct because of the Trump administration, and they will not forgive or forget Bernhardt's avarice," said Suckling. "It's heartless to condemn a species to

extinction just so his former clients can make a few more bucks.”

Over the past two years, the Trump administration has denied protection to 55 imperiled species of animals and plants, while listing only 16 species under the Endangered Species Act — the slowest rate of any administration in history.

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