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### **Zinke Out at Interior. His Likely Replacement is Even Worse for Our Public Lands**

Washington – Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has announced his resignation amid an array of scandals that have plagued his time at the Interior Department. Ryan Zinke was confirmed as Secretary of the Interior on March 1, 2017. During his time in the job, Secretary Zinke wasted no time gutting regulations that help reduce pollution, eliminating protections for public lands and national monuments, and opening up our iconic landscapes to oil and gas drilling. And if Ryan Zinke was bad, his likely replacement, David Bernhardt, is even worse.

#### **Statement by Adam Kolton, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:**

“From the moment Secretary Zinke paraded in on horseback he’s presided over a reign of terror for our most cherished wild places. Nowhere has this been more evident than in Alaska where he has sought to rush leasing and exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, setting arbitrary and reckless deadlines for reviews. He has attempted to dismantle protections for the Arctic Ocean and open Alaska’s coastlines to offshore development. Most recently, he has taken aim at millions of acres of public land in the western Arctic, auctioning off sensitive wildlife habitat at bargain basement prices. And Secretary Zinke initiated an unprecedented and we believe illegal land exchange that removed designated wilderness lands from the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

Misusing taxpayer money, doling out favors to oil and gas industry allies and silencing scientific experts is the legacy Secretary Zinke will leave behind. He spent more time marred by ethical scandals with lobbyists who want to destroy our public lands and oceans, than fulfilling his stewardship responsibilities for America’s great outdoors. Far from the Teddy Roosevelt disciple he claimed he would be, Secretary Zinke has dishonored that once proud GOP conservation legacy.

Unfortunately, his rumored replacement could be even worse, especially for Alaska’s public lands. David Bernhardt is a former oil and gas lobbyist and former Bush administration official who has [notoriously altered or omitted data to distort Interior Department conclusions](#). He also served as lead attorney on the State of Alaska’s lawsuit trying to push through seismic exploration in the Arctic Refuge yet has refused to recuse himself from any of the vital permitting and environmental review decisions for this iconic landscape. We urge President Trump to name a new Secretary of Interior who would restore not only integrity and honor to the office but deliver on the conservation leadership Americans expect and that future generations deserve.”

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