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Alaska Wilderness League Statement on Confirmation of David Bernhardt to Interior Secretary

Washington, D.C. — Alaska Wilderness League Executive Director Adam Kolton issues the following statement on today's confirmation of David Bernhardt to be the next Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior:

“David Bernhardt is a walking conflict of interest with a long pattern of putting fossil fuel interests first and the sound stewardship of our natural resources a distant second. Nowhere has this pattern been more obvious than with Alaska's public lands and waters. It was Mr. Bernhardt's decision to keep Arctic oil and gas lease sales and permitting moving forward during the government shutdown, even as national parks were shuttered, and vital daily services were being ignored.

Mr. Bernhardt was former Secretary Zinke's wingman for a series of decisions the courts have now deemed illegal, including attempts to reverse protections for millions of acres of the Arctic Ocean and force a road through the designated wilderness of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

During his first stint at Interior during the George W. Bush administration, Bernhardt has been accused of altering data to distort agency conclusions about the Arctic Refuge in a bid to advance drilling. As a lawyer in private practice, he represented the State of Alaska in its quest to push through seismic testing in the Arctic Refuge. And in his role in the Trump administration as Deputy and then Acting Secretary, he has pushed a rushed, inadequate review of the impacts of oil and gas development in Arctic wilderness, aiming to hold a lease sale twice as fast as was stipulated in the 2017 tax bill. Now, under his direction, BLM is covering up valid scientific concerns and allowing outdated and incomplete science to inform the critical decision about whether and how oil and gas development will occur in one of the world's most iconic landscapes.

Now that he has been confirmed, we can only hope that Mr. Bernhardt will understand the job of Interior Secretary means being the nation's chief steward of our national treasures and not simply an extension of fossil fuel industries. Absent that, it will be incumbent on Congress and the courts to rein him in.”

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