

Union of Concerned Scientists

Science for a Healthy Planet and Safer World

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Trump Administration Rescinds Policy that Promoted Science-Based Decision-making for National Parks



What happened: Top officials at the Department of the Interior (DOI) ordered the deputy director of the National Park Service (NPS) to [dismiss a directive](#) that promoted science-based decision-making as a guiding principle for the preservation of ecological, historical, and cultural treasures at national parks, for reasons that appear to be politically motivated.

Why it matters: Public policy decisions that are meant to protect America's public health and the environment are most effective when informed by scientific evidence. This cannot happen when science is sidelined in the policy-making process. It is particularly important that policy decisions are informed by science at the DOI, as [their mission statement](#) states that it "protects and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage" by providing "scientific and other information about those resources." Our national parks are under severe threat from [rising seas, floods, and wildfires](#)

and, if we want to protect our parks, we need policies that promote the best science available.

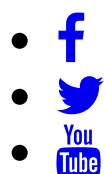
[Director's Order #100](#) was established at the National Park Service (NPS) as a way of building a new science-based framework for managing natural and cultural resources at national parks. It was developed due to [pleas from scientists](#) on the National Park System Advisory Board for NPS to update its vision of the national parks to include scientific evidence to better protect America's parks and monuments. Specifically, Director's Order #100 took into account issues of [environmental and societal changes](#) (i.e. climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and land use changes), and decision-making based on three factors: 1) the best available science, 2) adherence to the law, and 3) long-term public interest. The order also encouraged the view of "our parks as an integral part of larger networks of protected lands, waters and resources." The directive was rolled out at NPS in December 2016 and was rescinded in August 2017 by one of the key architects of its development, the deputy director of the National Park Service, Michael Reynolds. At the time, no explanation was given for the withdrawal – not even a press release was written on the decision.

According to [email correspondence](#) obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) by the Union of Concerned Scientists, in June 2017 Reynolds was ordered by top DOI officials to rescind the order in no uncertain terms: "Pursuant to direction from (Interior) Secretary (Ryan) Zinke, I hereby instruct you to rescind Director's Order #100." Jonathan Jarvis, the National Park Service director during the Obama Administration and the individual who signed the Director's Order #100 into policy, believes that the current administration has objections over the use of the "[precautionary principle](#)" in the directive. The precautionary principle states that "when an action, activity, or emerging condition raises plausible or probable threats of harm to park resources and/or human health, management should take anticipatory action even when there is uncertainty" – in short, this framework is promoting science-based decision processes on issues of harm to the park or human health even when there is uncertainty. Another possibility for the policy's withdrawal is that it attempted to incorporate issues associated with a [changing climate](#) into management decision processes.

Three-quarters of the National Park System Advisory Board [later quit in January 2018](#) because DOI Secretary Zinke refused to meet with the scientists and former elected officials. Previously, officials at the NPS [deleted mentions of humans' role](#) in causing climate change in a report on sea level rise and storm surges. The DOI has shown a [pattern of valuing political ideology](#) over the voices of scientists. Now that the science-based policy, Director's Order #100, has been rescinded, there is less protection of the ecological, historical, and cultural treasures at our national parks, and therefore less opportunities to enjoy the beauty and riches of our parks in the years to come.

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