# The Coal Files: The Trump Administration's Plan to Revive the Fledgling Industry

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The Trump Administration is staying true to its promise to breathe life back into the American coal industry – and it is doing it in a very contentious way. The Administration has stated its intent to allow coal mining on lands owned directly by the federal government, previously set aside under the American Antiquities Act of 1906. The Act gives the president authority to declare that historic landmarks are national monuments so long as they are situated on federally owned or controlled land. The Obama Administration used this authority to deem certain lands off-limits for coal production.

As Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke stated in his Interim Report Pursuant to Executive Order 13792:

"Although there are many instances of the use of the Act for the proper stewardship of objects of historic of scientific interest, concerns have been raised regarding
1.) The use of the Act to designate 'landscape' monuments that reserve large areas of Federal lands for the purposed of restricting public access and traditional uses;
2.) The use of monument designation to prevent or restrict land use rather than to 'protect' and preserve objects significance;
3.) The process by which Presidents have exercised such authority, including whether it included proper public outreach and coordination with state, tribal, and local officials;
4.) The potential losses of economic opportunity and jobs lost as a result of monument designation."

The push to reinvigorate the coal industry by using these designated lands has sparked concern about environmental and safety hazards. Meanwhile, many inside and outside of the Trump Administration have argued that production on these lands can be done safely, will create jobs and boost exports.

The moratorium put in place under the Obama Administration cut the coal industry off at the knees. A previous report by the American Action Forum found that the moratorium (if it had been allowed to continue indefinitely) would result in job loss. Between 2008 and 2012, more than 50,000 coal jobs were lost due to policies that forced the closure of coal plants. Average coal miner wages are $21.63 per hour which comes out to roughly $54,000 per year. That amounted to over $2.6 billion in lost wages in President Obama's first term alone.

In March 2017, Secretary Zinke lifted the moratorium as part of an executive order that repealed certain environmental restrictions on energy production. The lift allowed the Bureau of Land Management to resume progressing coal mining leases on its land  Executive Order, No. 3348 discussed the critical importance of the federal coal lease program to the U.S. economy citing it produces roughly 40 percent of our nation's supply, creates energy security and promotes job creation.

The removal of the moratorium will have a positive effect on U.S. economic output. The average value of federal land is estimated at $4,100 per acre, which puts the value of current federal land used for coal leases at over $19 billion—a return that will only grow as the moratorium is lifted and coal producers get back to work. While safety and environmental concerns must be mitigated, responsibly opening more federally owned land to mining will help boost economic growth, and may very well allow for growth in the coal industry.