
LAS VEGAS SUN

SUN EDITORIAL:

Preserving precious places

New Interior Department secretary shows respect for unique Western lands

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In blocking immediate approvals of oil and gas leases on 77 parcels of federal land Wednesday, new Interior Secretary Ken Salazar displayed respect for some of the West's most prized landscapes.

The parcels cover about 130,000 acres near such spectacular destinations as Nine Mile Canyon in eastern Utah, Arches National Park in southern Utah and Dinosaur National Monument, which straddles northeastern Utah and northwestern Colorado.

The leases were approved in the waning days of the Bush administration, which was known for the accelerated pace at which it granted approvals for drilling on Western lands.

Salazar harshly criticized the previous administration's land-use positions in a telephone interview with reporters after blocking not only the above-mentioned lease sales, but eight others in Wyoming.

"The policy positions of the Interior Department over the last years have really been driven out of the White House, and we're looking at many of those decisions," he said, according to reporting by The Washington Post.

We are not opposed to domestic drilling, but we are strongly opposed to the notion that drilling is appropriate everywhere that oil and gas companies want to go.

Nine Mile Canyon, whose name comes from early mapping but is actually 40 miles long, has been called the "world's longest art gallery." Its 1,000-year-old abundant and spectacular rock art was created by American Indians.

Arches National Park contains more than 2,000 natural sandstone arches and endless other colorful and fascinating rock formations.

Dinosaur National Monument was dedicated by President Woodrow Wilson after a geologist discovered well-preserved remains of thousands of dinosaurs there.

These are areas that by all means should be carefully preserved. Salazar's order was meant to assure that. He left open the option to allow drilling on some of the 77 parcels — but only if studies prove it would not threaten the air quality or other aspects of the nearby protected areas, the Post reported.

This early decision by Salazar is encouraging. We hope he continues to show this level of respect for America's precious places.

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