

President Obama Working to Reverse President Bush's Environmental Legacy

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Kai Point Coal Mine.

(PhysOrg.com) -- In the U.S., there is a tradition followed by outgoing presidents: Enact as many new policies as possible -- especially if you think that the incoming president would disapprove. This practice has been used by presidents of both political parties with increasing fervor since Ronald Reagan. And President George W. Bush was no exception. In the months leading up to the inauguration of Barack Obama, Bush enacted a number of policies that stripped away a number of environmental protections. And, almost since he has taken the oath of office, President Obama's team has been working to reverse these policies.

So far, the effort to reverse the environmental policies enacted by Bush has been slow going. This is because some of the policies require an act of Congress to overturn. In cases where Congress is not needed, the courts may be appealed to, or new rules need to be made. For the most part, all of these decisions require some sort of review. And, as we know, when the government bureaucracy has to engage in a review process (or any process), the paperwork piles up and politics slows things down. But that's not to say there hasn't been any success. Two of the most recent victories claimed by the Obama Administration include:

1. Endangered species. Bush had gotten rid of rules that required an independent assessment of government project impacts of [endangered species](#). Many argued that this weakening of the [Endangered Species Act](#) would lead to environmental problems. In March, though, [Obama managed to reinstate the rule](#). Before government agencies can move forward with projects, or approve projects on government land, scientists have to review the impact on endangered species. This includes requiring oil and gas companies to have their projects reviewed for possible danger to [polar bears](#) before they engage in Arctic projects.

2. Mining waste. In the later days of the Bush Administration, it was decided that mountaintop mining operations could, in fact, dump their waste near streams and rivers. While many environmentalists feel that mountaintop mining itself is a problem, and would like to see the practice ended altogether, the reversal still represents a victory. It means that miners have to continue the practice of keeping waste out of waterways.

In addition to the above regulations, the EPA is getting some of its power back, after being largely undercut by the Bush Administration. The EPA is reconsidering a permit issued for a coal fired power plant last summer. The permit was approved, but no environmental impact assessment was done, and there are a number of issues that the EPA

would like to address -- including those put forth by some residents of the Navajo Nation who are concerned about the impacts the plant would have on their land.

Other environmental policies carried over from the Bush years that the Obama Administration wants to reverse include [America's role in global efforts to curb climate change](#), exempting factory farms from air quality reports, allowing companies to burn hazardous waste for fuel and costly and polluting oil shale development. In some cases, though, concerned citizens are doing the work for the government, challenging Bush era policies in court and asking for their own injunctions.

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