

New Mexico at Risk: New Report “State of Risk” Reveals Broad, Adverse Impact on NM Communities and Public Health from Threatened EPA Cuts

Congress to decide fate of critical environmental operations for the Land of Enchantment

December 1, 2017

NEWS RELEASE

[*State of Risk: New Mexico*](#), a new report from the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), catalogues far-reaching and grave threats to air, water and land, and to the people and economy of New Mexico if President Trump’s proposed 30 percent cut to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) budget is enacted. Such cuts would move the agency funding radically backward to its lowest level since the mid-1970s.

It provides an extensive overview of the EPA’s footprint in New Mexico and examines how the proposed cutback plans threaten public health and critical environmental programs in the Land of Enchantment. States and local governments would face a terrible choice: stick taxpayers with the bill, drop other projects or watch their communities slide backward and become more polluted and less healthy.

The EPA has provided \$111 million in grants alone to New Mexico over five years, notes the report.

“President Trump’s plan will kill safe-water projects, undermine clean air monitoring and leave tracts of land in New Mexico polluted and undevelopable,” said Elgie Holstein, EDF’s Senior Director of Strategic Planning.

“The President’s plan will eliminate or weaken efforts to clean up dirty air and water, as well as hazardous waste sites,” Holstein added, “This is not just an assault on an agency. It is an assault on people’s health and safety.”

Documenting specific local and statewide consequences of the proposed EPA cuts, the report finds that hollowing out the EPA would be disastrous for New Mexico.

“Washington is so broken right now that the Trump road map could be in a backroom deal at any time,” said Holstein.

The report provides a snapshot of the environmental and public health challenges facing New Mexico and the role EPA plays in addressing them:

- **Drinking water is at risk in New Mexico.** 87 percent of New Mexico's public water supply comes from ground water, and the budget proposed by the Trump Administration would decimate funding for programs that protect rivers, lakes, streams and groundwater across the state. The New Mexico Environment Department's Ground Water Quality Bureau reports more than 60 ongoing cleanups of water contamination from chemicals—exactly the kinds of occurrences is dedicated to ameliorating.
- **Dangerous runoff in New Mexico's water.** In the last five years, New Mexico received \$14.8 million from EPA's Water Pollution Control grants and another \$4.7 million from EPA's State Public Water System Supervision grants. Those numbers would be severely diminished if Trump's budget were enacted—he calls for 30% cuts to both grants.
- **Clean air is at risk in New Mexico.** Albuquerque had 113 days of elevated smog pollution in 2015, 22nd highest in the country, and only three counties received a grade of B or higher for air quality. From 2012-2016 New Mexico received \$12.6 million in Air Pollution Control Program Support grants. Cuts to the budget will have significant consequences for the 120,000 adults and 34,000 children in New Mexico diagnosed with asthma.
- **Leaking underground storage tanks threaten New Mexico.** New Mexico has a backlog of more than 830 leaking underground storage tanks which are at risk of polluting soil and water with chemicals such as oil, gas, benzene, and toluene. In the past five years, New Mexico received \$2.77 million in funding from Leaking Underground Storage Tanks grants and another \$2.75 million from the Trust Fund to Address Backlog of Hazardous Tanks.
- **Stunting economic development in New Mexico.** Brownfield sites—where toxic contamination prevents economic development and threatens public health—keep New Mexicans from leveraging available resources and space. A study shows that by restoring a brownfield site, property values within a 1.24 mile radius of that site increase 5 to 15 percent. The historic Santa Fe Railyard was blighted with lead, other metals and petroleum in the 1980's. It has since been restored into a thriving city space with museums, a farmers market and shops, and a hub for commuter trains. Over the last five years, New Mexico has received \$2.9 million in Brownfield grants.
- **Toxic sites threaten New Mexico.** New Mexico had 20 hazardous waste sites on the EPA Superfund National Priorities List in late 2017, and the state received more than \$10.8 million in Superfund grants from 2012 to 2016. Trump wants to cut Superfund spending by 30 percent, leaving New Mexicans vulnerable.
- **Tribal communities at risk in New Mexico.** New Mexico tribes received \$11.6 million from 2012 to 2016 through EPA's Indian Environmental General Assistant Program, which helps Indian tribes establish environmental programs and develop and implement plans for handling hazardous waste. The Trump administration wants to cut the program by 30 percent.

Recent budgets proposed by the House of Representatives and Senate also seek to cut EPA's budget, albeit by somewhat less than Trump's radical proposal. Still, their proposals signal a ready willingness to degrade the Agency and its ability to protect people and the environment. Congress, which has traditionally provided bipartisan support for environmental safeguards that protect constituents, is falling out of step with public support for a strong EPA.

Holstein, who formerly oversaw environment and science budgets for the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, said New Mexico's Congressional delegation will find in the new report the critical ways in which EPA has been helping the state manage risk.

"Congress can and must stop the madness of these proposed cuts," Holstein said. "Anything less than full EPA funding for 2018 would hobble the environmental protections on which New Mexicans and others across the United States rely to protect their families and communities."