

## ‘Emergency’ energy order could threaten Wyo wetlands



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Wetlands in Yellowstone National Park. Photo: Jacob W. Frank // NPS

WYOMING — Last week, President Donald Trump issued an executive order titled “Declaring a National Energy Emergency,” marking more than 600 applications for energy project permits that could destroy wetlands or impact waterways for fast-track review.

According to the order, the aim is to address that “the energy and critical minerals (‘energy’)

identification, leasing, development, production, transportation, refining and generation capacity of the U.S. are all far too inadequate to meet our Nation's needs." But Reuters confirms that oil and gas production reached record highs under the Biden Administration and the U.S. Energy Information Administration confirms solar and wind energy generation also grew rapidly.

Traditionally, the Corps of Engineers has conducted wetlands and waterway impact reviews under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, with public notification and the opportunity for public comment before issuing permits that often included conditions that limit environmental harm. Under the order, the Army Corps of Engineers is now required to "facilitate the Nation's energy supply" with "emergency" permitting under the Clean Water Act, effectively filling wetlands and dredging or building in waterways for projects that include pipelines, gold mines, employee housing and more.

The order also allows for the use of an "emergency" loophole that violates the Endangered Species Act and protections extended from it.

But Program Coordinator for Wyoming Wetlands Society Bill Long tells *Buckrail* that wetlands are critical, particularly in Wyoming since they're what he calls "a limited resource" in the state. Long notes that wetlands provide many things including replenishing aquifers and cleaning water by removing nutrient-loading by the vegetation associated with wetlands. In many watersheds, wetlands provide a mechanism where silt drops out of the water column resulting in cleaner water associated with Wyoming's streams and rivers.

The riparian habitats associated with these systems also support approximately 85% of the wildlife species in an arid state such as Wyoming.

"I would hope that the fast tracking or streamlining of the wetland review process is adequate to protect watersheds, wetlands and the rivers and streams," Long tells *Buckrail*. "You just have to trust that the people reviewing the applications make the appropriate decisions to protect Wyoming's wetlands."