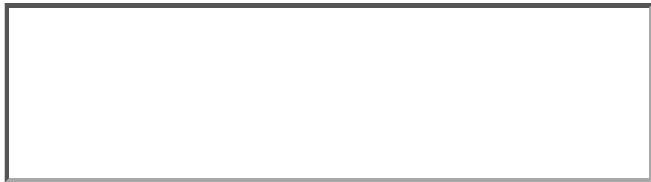


# The Extinction Order: Trump's Executive Order 14270 Doesn't Deregulate; It Dismantles

**Henry David Thoreau once wrote, “In wildness is the preservation of the world.” But wildness cannot survive without protection, and protection is what this order destroys.**

John Marks | May 11, 2025 Common Dreams  
Opinion



On April 9, 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14270, blandly titled “Zero-Based Regulatory Budgeting to Unleash American Energy.” Behind that bureaucratic name is a sweeping directive: Dismantle a century of environmental protections.

Every regulation related to the environment, natural resources, or energy, whether it safeguards air, water, species, or public lands, must be rewritten to serve polluters or vanish by default.

**Without you, Common Dreams simply wouldn't exist.**

**In a moment that demands fearless reporting, Common Dreams needs your support to keep our independent journalism alive.**

\* indicates required

Email Address 

Subscribe

Some will claim this is just about efficiency. But no standard review process sets a mass expiration date for protections, regardless of science, impact, or legal mandate. This is not streamlining. It is a countdown to erasure.

While courts deliberate, rules will expire. Enforcement will be suspended. Polluters will act as if the rules are already gone.

The deadline is September 30, 2026. Any rule not revised and reauthorized by then will expire automatically.

What will remain will not be protection. It will not be science. It will not be law. It will be a hollow shell, stripped of enforcement and public purpose.

This is not reform. It is demolition. It is sabotage by executive order.

## **They Said It Couldn't Happen**

To everyone who said, "They'd never go that far," they just did. And the collapse has already begun.

With Executive Order 14270, Donald Trump issued not a policy revision but a regulatory kill order.

The EO mandates that all regulations under energy-related authority—especially those administered by agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Departments of Interior and Energy—must be reviewed and either revised to align with the administration's priorities or be automatically terminated by September 30, 2026. While for

some agencies the EO does not name specific laws, many foundational protections fall within these agencies' regulatory domains.

Some may argue this is simply a regulatory reset or a call for modernization. But this is not a review guided by science, need, or public interest. It is a mandate that requires rules to serve industry or disappear by default. There is no neutral path. There is no room for delay. If an agency fails to revise and reauthorize a rule in time, it expires. No matter how vital it is.

Legal experts and environmental attorneys have described similar regulatory strategies by the previous Trump administration as calculated attempts to dismantle environmental protections from within.

Even the rules that survive review will be rewritten, stripped of science and purpose, then repackaged as hollow compliance.

This is not a bureaucratic obstacle. It is a regulatory kill switch.

What that means in practice:

- Endangered Species Act—gone.
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act—gone.
- Marine Mammal Protection Act—one.
- Anadromous Fish Conservation Act—under threat.
- Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act—gone.

These aren't just under review. They are all under attack.

## **Breadth and Scope of the Loss**

The laws everyone recognizes, such as the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act, are just the beginning.

Beneath them lie hundreds of foundational rules that safeguard public health, climate resilience, environmental justice, and disaster readiness. Under Executive Order 14270, they are all at risk.

Supporters may claim the order only targets outdated or burdensome regulations. But the text

applies broadly and indiscriminately. It sets no exceptions for essential rules, no protections for high-impact safeguards, and no criteria for public benefit. Unless these rules are rewritten to meet the new standards and reauthorized by September 30, 2026, they will expire. Along with them goes the regulatory backbone of modern environmental protection.

This is not theoretical. These laws will fall unless actively rescued.

Key protections on the chopping block:

### **Air, Water, and Public Health**

- Clean Air Act
- Clean Water Act
- Safe Drinking Water Act
- Toxic Substances Control Act
- Superfund cleanup authority
- Mercury and Air Toxics Standards

### **Land and Resource Protection**

- Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
- Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act
- Wilderness Act
- Antiquities Act
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act

### **Energy and Climate**

- Energy Policy Act of 2005
- Greenhouse gas endangerment finding
- Energy Star Program
- Oil Pollution Act of 1990

Each of these took years, sometimes decades, of organizing, science, and compromise to create. They were not handed down by elites. They were won by people who refused to accept poisoned air, burning rivers, and dead coastlines.

Now they are being erased in a single executive order. Not one by one. All at once. This is not

a rollback. It is erasure.

## **The Hidden Collapse**

Executive Order 14270 does not just target major environmental laws. It dismantles the infrastructure that makes those laws real.

Supporters may argue that the laws remain untouched. But behind every statute, like the Clean Water Act or Endangered Species Act, are thousands of rules, monitoring systems, enforcement protocols, and technical standards. Without them, laws are just words on paper.

Now, all of that must be rewritten to serve polluters. If not, it disappears permanently.

Thousands of environmental regulations administered by agencies such as the EPA and the Department of the Interior could be subject to review and potential termination under Executive Order 14270.

Here is what that collapse looks like:

### **Public Health Protections**

- Air monitoring rules vanish. No alerts for lead, benzene, or ozone.
- Radiation limits are lifted. Safety near nuclear sites erodes.
- Vehicle emissions testing ends. Smog returns to U.S. cities.

### **Water, Waste, and Pollution**

- Stormwater runoff restrictions disappear. Waste floods rivers.
- Hazardous waste transport rules vanish. Disposal turns chaotic.
- Drilling oversight ends. Protected lands are opened to industry.

### **Climate and Disaster Response**

- Energy efficiency rules are revoked. Electric bills rise.
- Fire mitigation programs are defunded. Wildfires grow deadlier.
- Fisheries protections vanish. Coastal economies are destabilized.

This is not just about forests or fish. It is about tap water, asthma medication, grocery prices, and cancer risks.

Betsy Southerland, former EPA director of science and technology for water, has warned that deregulatory approaches of this kind could lead to systemic breakdowns in public health protections.

This order does not trim fat. It guts the public architecture that keeps America safe, functional, and future-ready.

## **The Economic and Societal Cost**

The damage from Executive Order 14270 will not stop with wildlife or wilderness. It will hammer the economy; threaten public health; and unravel industries that depend on clean air, safe water, and protected landscapes.

Some defenders will argue that environmental regulations stifle business, raise costs, or limit innovation. But environmental law in America was not born from ideology. It was forged in crisis, created to prevent economic collapse, mass illness, and ecological ruin. Many of these statutes were passed with overwhelming bipartisan support because Americans knew the cost of doing nothing was greater.

The Clean Air Act passed under former President Richard Nixon. The 1972 Clean Water Act was called “the most comprehensive and expensive environmental legislation in the nation’s history.” These laws did not just protect nature. They helped build the modern economy.

Many of the protections now targeted form the backbone of multibillion-dollar industries:

### **Wildlife and National Identity**

- The Endangered Species Act saved the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and California condor.
- The Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects ecosystems and supports rural economies across the country.
- The Marine Mammal Protection Act helped build a coastal tourism sector that generates billions.
- Fish conservation laws sustain sport fishing, a major driver in many regional economies.

### **Outdoor Economies**

- Outdoor recreation supports \$887 billion in consumer spending and 7.6 million jobs.
- Hiking, hunting, wildlife viewing, and camping all depend on healthy ecosystems.

- Without habitat protections, what is Yellowstone without wolves, or the coast without whales?

The law may speak of species and land. But the stakes are money, jobs, health, and identity.

This executive order guts the systems that protect them all.

## **The Human Toll and Environmental Injustice**

The collapse will not hit everyone equally. It never does.

When environmental protections vanish, the first to suffer are the poor, the marginalized, and the politically powerless.

Some may argue that environmental burdens are shared evenly across society. But the data and history say otherwise. Environmental harm follows lines of poverty, race, and neglect. It hits those with the fewest resources, the least political power, and the highest exposure to toxins.

Without the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act, vulnerable communities will lose safeguards against dumping, runoff, and lead contamination. New water crises will erupt in towns already on the edge.

Without the Clean Air Act, toxic smog will return to cities, especially in low-income and minority neighborhoods shaped by redlining and industrial zoning.

Without the National Environmental Policy Act, communities will have no voice in what gets built near their homes: pipelines, refineries, highways, landfills.

Without Superfund enforcement, the most toxic sites in America will be left to rot. Poison will seep into soil, water, and lives.

This is not theory. It is already happening:

- In Louisiana's Cancer Alley, petrochemical plants poison Black neighborhoods. Cancer rates there are 50 times the national average.
- In West Virginia, abandoned coal towns face toxic water and respiratory illness.
- In Alaska and the Southwest, Indigenous communities still live beside Cold War-era uranium

waste.

- Along the Pacific coast, salmon vanish and fishing economies unravel.

These are not isolated stories. They are previews.

The burden will fall hardest on those without lawyers, lobbyists, or local health departments—families already excluded from public hearings, ignored by regulators, and left behind by politics.

Executive Order 14270 turns temporary harm into permanent abandonment.

This is not just inequality. It is environmental apartheid..

## **Regulatory Collapse Is Guaranteed**

This is not hypothetical. It is structural failure, built into the design.

Executive Order 14270 sets an impossible mandate: Every environmental regulation must be reviewed, revised, and reauthorized by September 30, 2026. If not, it will expire automatically.

Some will claim that with enough willpower and coordination, agencies can meet the deadline. But that is a myth. There are not enough staff. There is not enough time. And there is no intention to make it work. The order was built to break the system, not to improve it.

Environmental watchdogs and legal analysts suggest that only a small percentage of rules could realistically be reviewed and reissued before the deadline.

This is not deregulation. It is planned demolition.

Here is what that guarantees:

- Legal protections for ecosystems will collapse.
- Clean air and water rules will disappear.
- Ecotourism and outdoor recreation will suffer.
- Climate policy will be paralyzed.
- Inequality will worsen as states scramble to fill the void.
- Courts will be overwhelmed by lawsuits and confusion.
- Irreversible environmental damage will be locked in for generations.



Even if a future administration tries to reverse the damage, it could take years or even decades to rebuild what was destroyed.

Some things will not survive that long: species, coastlines, forests, ecosystems.

This is not a policy failure. It is policy used as a weapon.

The extinction of environmental protections is not a side effect. It is the goal.

## **Can This EO Actually Be Enforced?**

Technically, yes. Executive Order 14270 can be enforced. But legally and practically, it is a minefield for all concerned.

Agencies can initiate rule reviews and assign expiration dates, especially when leadership supports the administration's anti-regulatory agenda. But that does not make it lawful.

Under the Administrative Procedure Act, agencies must follow strict procedures before repealing or replacing rules. They must issue public notices, allow comment periods, hold hearings, and provide justifications. They cannot simply say, "The president told us to."

Some defenders may argue the president has broad authority to manage agencies. But the law is clear: Regulatory repeal must follow legal process. Many of the protections targeted by this order were enacted by Congress. Agencies do not have the authority to let them quietly expire or gut them without breaking the law.

That is why lawsuits are already being filed. Legal challenges will come from environmental groups, state attorneys general, and public interest organizations.

But here is the catch: the damage will not wait.

While courts deliberate, rules will expire. Enforcement will be suspended. Polluters will act as if the rules are already gone.

Even if a judge rules against the administration, the harm will be done:

- Toxic waste released.
- Forests cleared.

- Communities exposed.

And if the White House refuses to comply? There is no enforcement arm of the Administrative Procedure Act. No agency exists to compel federal departments to enforce their own rules.

The only option is to sue, repeatedly, rule by rule, across jurisdictions.

As one Earthjustice attorney put it, “The law doesn’t enforce itself. And this administration knows it.”

Litigation takes money, time, expertise, and legal standing. These are resources many frontline communities do not have.

Environmental lawyers and watchdogs saw this coming. They are already planning for fights across dozens of fronts: air quality, pipelines, species protection, data suppression, and executive action.

But how many lawsuits will it take? 10? 50? 100?

Each one will be slow. Expensive. Uncertain.

This is not incompetence. It is sabotage, carried out with full intent.

## **And What About the Planet**

This executive order is not just a domestic disaster. It is a climate change nuclear bomb.

Executive Order 14270 erases the foundation of nearly every federal climate policy:

- It nullifies the greenhouse gas endangerment finding, the legal trigger for regulating carbon emissions.
- It dismantles efficiency standards for appliances, buildings, and vehicles.
- It undermines the Energy Star Program and other clean energy incentives.
- It guts methane rules, fuel economy standards, and oil spill safeguards.

Some will argue that climate progress can continue without federal policy, through state action or private innovation. But without national coordination, incentives, and legal authority, that progress will slow, fragmented, and ultimately fall short. Federal policy drives investment,

enforces accountability, and sets the global tone.

With these tools gone, the United States cannot meet its climate goals. Not nationally. Not globally.

We will miss our Paris agreement targets. We will exceed the 1.5°C warming threshold. And we will pull other nations backward with us.

The damage is not just about emissions. It is about lost leadership. Lost credibility. And a green light to polluters everywhere.

This is not a pause. It is a reversal.

Climate collapse is no longer a distant danger. It is a scheduled event, signed into law by the president.

## **The Heart of It**

This executive order does not repeal environmental laws. It kills the systems that make those laws work.

The Clean Air Act will still exist. But if EPA regulations expire, there will be no enforcement.

The Endangered Species Act will remain on paper. But without specific protections and triggers, no species will be protected.

This is the method: Dismantle implementation. Remove enforcement. Let the law collapse from the inside out.

It is a bureaucratic kill switch, designed to erase a century of environmental progress without ever repealing a statute.

Legal on paper. Lethal in practice.

Once the rules disappear, the laws become theater:

- No enforcement.
- No funding.

- No consequences.

They will still be on the books, but they will no longer matter.

Empty laws. Empty air. Empty rivers. Empty promises.

## How We Fight, and Why We Must

There is no silver-bullet lawsuit. No single agency. No shortcut.

This executive order will not be stopped by one clever court challenge. It will take dozens, perhaps hundreds, of battles—rule by rule, agency by agency, ecosystem by ecosystem.

Some will ask, why not file one big lawsuit to stop it all? Because Executive Order 14270 does not repeal a single law. It sets a countdown clock for thousands of regulations to vanish unless reauthorized. That makes it nearly lawsuit-proof by design. Each rule must be challenged individually, and only after harm has occurred. Courts cannot force agencies to act unless Congress explicitly mandates it. And even then, litigation takes time. By the time a ruling arrives, the damage may already be done. The law does not enforce itself. And this executive order exploits that fact.

There is no cavalry. Only us.

So we fight, everywhere:

- **File lawsuits, fast and often:** Legal action is the first and last line of defense. Every expired rule must be challenged. Every unlawful revision must be contested. Rapid-response legal teams must be ready to sue the EPA, Department of the Interior, and Department of Energy across multiple jurisdictions. Delay means destruction.
- **Support legal and watchdog organizations:** Groups like Earthjustice, Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Center for Biological Diversity are already fighting. But they are underfunded and overwhelmed. They need staff, experts, and resources. Every donation matters. Every volunteer strengthens the line.
- **Pressure elected officials at every level:** Demand public hearings. Demand oversight. Call your governor. Write your city council. Make it politically toxic to support this executive

order.

- **Act locally:** States and cities can pass their own clean air and water laws. They can fund conservation, restrict drilling, and sue federal agencies. Join local groups. Attend zoning meetings. Run for water boards and planning commissions. Build resistance into local government.
- **Refuse to normalize this:** Speak out. Disrupt. Document. This is not politics as usual. Say so. Organize protests. Submit op-eds. Flood comment periods. Call out silence. Expose polluters. Make the truth visible.
- **Demand media coverage:** Executive Order 14270 should be a daily headline. If it is not, make it one. Share stories. Elevate frontline voices. Hold media outlets accountable. If national media fails, local and independent voices must rise.

This is a regulatory blitz. And resistance must be relentless.

The strategy is simple: flood the system, fracture it, and exhaust the opposition.

While we scramble to save species, lands, and laws, they bulldoze everything else.

This is not a warning. It is a dispatch from the front lines.

They are not debating whether to dismantle environmental protections. They are dismantling them, right now.

If you ever said, "They would never go that far," They just did.

This is not just bad policy. It is a deliberate attempt to cripple the government's ability to protect the air we breathe, the water we drink, the climate we depend on, and the living world we love.

It is not a mistake. It is the plan.

The question is no longer what they will do. The question is what we will do about it.