"Department of Environmental Protection— we are going to get rid of it in almost every form. We're going to have little tidbits left, but we're going to take a tremendous amount out."
Staying true to campaign promises like President Trump’s budget outline proposed defunding many non-military programs, with the Environmental Protection Agency bearing the brunt of the cuts.

Per his outline, they would cut the EPA’s funding by nearly a third and lay off more than 3,000 of its employees.

“We’ve got a climate denier as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, people embedded in all sorts of destructive industries running the interior department and some really radical ideas in Congress about privatizing our public lands that have been a legacy for hundreds of years now.”

- Chandra LeGue, Oregon Wild

Trump has not been shy about his distrust towards the EPA and climate change “theories,” which his newly-appointed Office of Budget and Management Director Mick Mulvaney deems “a waste of your money.”

As the nation’s leaders fight to take away funding from environmental protection and prevention groups, advocates in Oregon are sticking their feet in the mud, refusing to give in.

With the Trump administration focusing on creating jobs and maximizing America’s domestic production of goods, regard for the wellbeing of the environment seems to fall to the wayside — causing that responsibility to fall upon the backs of advocacy groups at the state-level.

“We need to fight harder and smarter than ever before,” Hannah Stohl, director and co-founder of Rogue Climate, said. “Also, now more than ever, environmental advocacy groups need to be building deep partnerships with communities of color, low-income and rural communities and immigrant communities who are often on the front lines of climate change and are also under attack from the current administration.”

With these cuts, the role of smaller, independent organizations – most of which are grassroots, nonprofit agencies — is more significant now than ever before.

 “[We have] definitely had to adjust some campaigns and strategies in light of the new administration and current federal political climate,” said Nick Cady, legal director for Cascadia Wildlands.

Organizations of all sizes and fervors are fighting for the environmental injustices that plague Oregon’s nature, speaking up for those that cannot.

“I think [environmental groups] are really relevant right now …” Chandra LeGue, western Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild, said. “We’ve always had to defend environmental gains that we’ve made in this country. But the current administration and Congress are quite hostile towards the work that we’re doing.”
There is undeniably a symbiotic relationship between Oregon communities and the organizations that are working to better them. State-level advocacy groups are turning to communities close to the issues they’re combatting to rally their members and help achieve their end goals. Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands and Rogue Climate are all focusing on turning community members into through programming and education.

“Ever since last year’s election, people have been really willing to go out and march, rally, call Congress, and [advocacy groups] have an important role in empowering citizens to take those actions. So, we want to educate them about what the environmental issues are and give them the tools and the voice that they need to speak up,” LeGue said. “We hold trainings and put out lots of information to people in Oregon who want to work to protect the environment but don’t know where to start, so that they can be better advocates for the place that they love.” Oregon Wild’s “Wild Ones” program hosts training sessions in Eugene, Bend and Portland to help spur locals to advocate and get their hands dirty.

Describing her group’s guiding principles, Stohl of Rogue Climate said, “We help local residents work for specific policy changes and programs in our communities, engaging many people who otherwise find it overwhelming to think about how to impact climate change and create clean energy jobs.” In 2016, the organization collaborated with the city of Talent, Oregon to adopt and integrate a Clean Energy Plan, to promote sustainability and to reduce the city’s overall environmental footprint.

Advocacy groups and concerned community members joined forces at the steps of the state capitol building in Salem at the Rally for Water and Wildlife on April 19, 2017 to stand up and speak out against clearcutting, wolf hunting, water contamination and additional issues facing the state’s environment.
There are hundreds of these sales moving forward at any given time, and we go out to ground-truth them and weigh in on the proposed sales to these agencies," Cady said. "This involves exploring the far corners of Oregon, getting well off the beaten path in all sorts of weather. We pack a lunch, our maps and compass, measuring tapes and tree bores (for calculating the age of trees) and head off into the woods, for sometimes a couple of days at a time."

Clearcutting, the process of cutting down and removing every tree in an area, is an issue that many advocates and groups of all sizes have been acting against. In Oregon, private timber companies are purchasing land on Federal Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management property in the western half of the state.

"There are hundreds of these sales moving forward at any given time, and we go out to ground-truth them and weigh in on the proposed sales to these agencies," Cady said. "This involves exploring the far corners of Oregon, getting well off the beaten path in all sorts of weather. We pack a lunch, our maps and compass, measuring tapes and tree bores (for calculating the age of trees) and head off into the woods, for sometimes a couple of days at a time."

At the Rally for Water and Wildlife, Patagonia ambassador and fly fishing guide Kate Taylor expressed an emotionally-charged plea for government intervention and reform on this issue:

Click to Listen
Pacific Coast Pipeline

Many groups and individuals are also rallying their efforts against the proposed Pacific Connector Pipeline. This project, proposed by Canadian energy company Veresen, would span 235 miles, shuttling natural gas from Malin, Oregon to the Jordan Cove LNG terminal in Coos Bay. With the pipeline, the company would be able to export 1.2 billion cubic feet of fracked gas to countries overseas. Its route crosses land managed by the Federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service, Bureau of Reclamation, as well as private lands.

While the project may have long term economic benefits, Stohl of Rogue Climate predicts that it would be an “environmental disaster.”

“Rogue Climate is a leader in a broad community coalition across southern Oregon that is fighting the Pacific Connector fracked gas pipeline and the Jordan Cove LNG export facility,” Stohl said. “Our coalition is made up of impacted landowners, environmental groups, anglers, indigenous communities, youth, and more. For over 10 years, the coalition has been fighting this LNG export facility through on the ground organizing and in the courts.”

Stohl said that the fracking project would affect nearly 400 rivers and streams, threatening their purity and risking extreme contamination. Among the at-risk: the Klamath, Rogue, Umpqua, Coos and Coquille rivers, as well as the Coos Bay estuary.

Not only would the pipeline disrespect the environment, but it would also disrupt traditional territories, burial grounds and cultural resources of many Native American tribes. Per Stohl, the Hoopa, Karuk, Yurok and Klamath Tribes have already passed resolutions against its construction.

Along with the expansive pipeline, Veresen is proposing the construction of Jordan Cove LNG export terminal to process, refine and export the gas.

While going to bat against large, industrial companies is no easy feat, Rogue Climate does not plan on halting its efforts in the slightest. Stohl believes that despite the lack of institutional support on their side, the power of community will be enough.

“Environmental groups also need to build relationships beyond the usual circles. Here in Oregon, for example, some conservatives are working with us to oppose the fracked gas pipeline and export terminal, while Governor Kate Brown and U.S. Senators Wyden and Merkley have refused to join us. At the same time, neither party has responded to the urgency of passing the Clean Energy Jobs Bill and investing in communities that need it most,” said Stohl.
One of the major issues impacted [by the current federal political climate] is the recovery of wolves in Oregon. It is crazy to us that ‘conservatives’ think a good use of taxpayer dollars is shooting animals from helicopters, but these are strange times.”

Back in 1947, gray wolves were removed from Oregon’s wildlands. Per Cascadia Wildlands, three wolves migrated back in to the state from Idaho, following the species' reintroduction in to that state. Of the three, one was shot dead, one was hit by a car and the third was captured and taken back to Idaho.

These events sparked the creation of the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan in 2005, which laid out a framework for recovering Oregon’s wolf population. Installed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), the plan underwent updates in 2010 and is projected to be updated again this year.

Per the plan’s executive summary, gray wolves were labeled an endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act in 2005. In 2009, the wolves were “federally delisted” in part of eastern Oregon, but a federal court decision in 2010 placed the species back on the list. To be delisted again, the species’ population must include at least four breeding pairs for three consecutive years.

The plan has received pushback from livestock farmers across the state who are worried about the wolves attacking their livestock and terrorizing their farms.

Groups like Cascadia Wildlands are still actively litigating to secure the protection of the state’s wolf population, as well as bridging the gap between concerned farmers and pro-wolf advocates.
The tenacious spirit of these groups and individuals is something Oregonians—and Americans—should be proud and indebted to. Who knows? In future years, they could be America’s only hope.

“My generation realizes that we need bold climate action and we need it now,” Stohl said. “It is going to take strong community pressure from the grassroots to get all our institutions—corporations, government, even some of our traditional progressive groups—to go beyond business as usual and build the fair, clean energy economy we need.”

Water Protection

With clearcutting, dredge mining and an impending fracking pipeline, Oregon’s water purity is at high-risk. Groups across the state are fighting for not only water purity, but public education on the toxins that infect the state’s waterways.

Oregon Wild recognizes that it is not just individuals who would be affected by water pollution, but the state’s major industries, too.

“We have an initiative called the Oregon Brew Shed Alliance, that connects breweries that see the importance of protecting clean water and the beer that they brew, so there’s a way to educate people about where their beer is coming from since it is such an important industry in Oregon and clean water is essential to it.”