

Thomas Sansonetti **Assistant Attorney General for** **Environment and Natural Resources**

Thomas Sansonetti is the Assistant Attorney General for Environment and Natural Resources. In this position, he is in charge of enforcing the nation's environmental and natural resource laws, including laws governing our national forests.

However, Sansonetti has consistently backed big energy interests over environmental interests. He has lobbied on behalf of mining operations and industries seeking access to public lands. And his actions as Solicitor of the Department of the Interior under George H. W. Bush demonstrate Sansonetti's interests side with industry, not the environment.

Bush Nominated Sansonetti For Top Justice Department Position That Enforces Environmental And Natural Resource Laws. Bush nominated Sansonetti to the Justice Department's top job for enforcing environmental and natural resource laws, as Assistant Attorney General for Environment and Natural Resources. Tom Sansonetti was a Republican conservative activist and Wyoming lawyer who has lobbied in Washington on behalf of coal mining operations and other industries seeking access to public lands. [Los Angeles Times, 6/24/01]

- **New York Times Slammed Appointment of Sansonetti:** In an editorial, the New York Times noted: "Over at Justice, meanwhile, the vital job of enforcing the nation's environmental laws awaits Senate approval of Thomas Sansonetti, a member of the Federalist Society, a property rights group, and an energetic lobbyist for coal mining operations and other industries seeking access to public lands. Mr. Sansonetti, who has a low opinion of the Endangered Species Act, once said admiringly of Gale Norton, another libertarian who now runs the Interior Department: "She understands the system. There won't be any biologists or botanists able to come in and pull the wool over her eyes." [New York Times, 8/19/01]

AS LOBBYIST, SANSONETTI REPRESENTED INDUSTRIES WHO WANTED GREATER ACCESS TO FEDERAL LAND

Sansonetti Worked As Industry Lobbyist Prior to Nomination. Sansonetti joined the law firm of Holland and Hart in 1993. There he worked on behalf of industry clients, industries whose interests lie in direct contradiction to the roadless area conservation rule. [Energy Daily, 4/5/01]

Sansonetti's Clients were Mostly Mining and Coal Companies: Sansonetti client list is mostly comprised of mineral and energy companies.

- **Arch Coal.** Arch Coal is the nation's second largest coal producer, supplying approximately one-tenth of America's total coal supply. [<http://www.archcoal.com>]
- **Peabody Coal.** Peabody is the largest private-sector coal company in the world. Peabody coal fuels 9 percent of U.S. electricity and 2.5 percent of the world's electricity. [<http://www.peabodyenergy.com>]
- **National Mining Association.**
- **Solvay Minerals.** Solvay Minerals is a major supplier of minerals. The firm is located in Texas. [<http://www.solvayminerals.com>]
- **Kennecott Energy Corp.** Kennecott is a major mining company. [www.kenergy.com]

Sansonetti Testified before Congress on Behalf of National Mining Association, Other Mining Firms; Sought to Increase Allowable Mining on Federal Lands. In 2000, Sansonetti appeared before a Senate committee to testify in support of a measure to expand mining opportunities on federal lands controlled by the Bureau of Land Management. He was representing the National Mining Association and Arch Coal, Inc., Peabody Holding Co., and Kennecott Energy Company. The legislation supported by Sansonetti would have increased limits to 75,000 acres in any state and 150,000 acres nationwide. [[Scripps Howard News Service](#), 4/5/01; Testimony Before The Senate Energy And Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee On Forests And Public Land Management, 6/7/00]

- **Sansonetti Complained Companies Are Nearing Limits of Federal Law.** "Certain coal companies in Wyoming and Utah are at or near the point where the existing acreage limits will impact and reduce their projected mine life," said Sansonetti. "In Utah, two companies are within 5,000 acres of exceeding the current cap," Sansonetti added. [[Coal Week](#), 6/12/00]

Sansonetti Represented The Altamont Pipeline In A Case That Decided Whether The Wyoming Portion Of The Pipeline Goes Through A City Or A Historic District.

Thomas Sansonetti represented the operators of the Altamont pipeline, a pipeline from Canada to southwest Wyoming, which was approved long ago by both Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Bureau of Land Management. In this case, the decision is one on whether the Wyoming portion goes over historic south pass or swings south through Jeffrey City. Sansonetti took the view that the Altamont case means that no energy project can feel safe from second guessing. Sansonetti said the pipeline was ready for a start early this year when then BLM Director Jim Bacca ordered a second look at the south pass route, apparently reacting to environmental protests. [[E&P Environment](#), 7/8/94]

SANSONETTI SERVED IN THE FIRST BUSH ADMINISTRATION WITH NORTON

Sansonetti Served As The Solicitor At Interior In The First Bush Administration.

Sansonetti served as the solicitor at Interior in the first Bush administration, the agency's number three slot. There he worked with now-Secretary Norton. [[New York Times](#), 5/12/01; [Scripps Howard News Service](#), 4/5/01]

Environmental Groups Challenged One Of Sansonetti's Rulings As Interior Department Solicitor. Environmentalists challenged a ruling by the Interior Department solicitor, Thomas Sansonetti, in which he held that prohibitions on mining under section 522(e) of the federal surface mining law were not applicable to underground mining subsidence. The environmentalist groups included the National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, with each group charging that Sansonetti's opinion violated both the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act and the Administrative Procedures Act. [[Inside Energy/with Federal Lands](#), 9/16/91]

- **Sansonetti Ruled That Public Areas Do Not Apply To Subsidence Caused By Other Underground Mining.** At issue was an opinion by Solicitor Thomas Sansonetti that found prohibitions on surface mining afforded under SMCRA to protect such areas as cemeteries, schools and other occupied dwellings do not apply to subsidence caused by underground mining. Instead, Sansonetti's ruling said, subsidence is regulated under section 516 of the act (IE/FL, 22 July 1). [[Inside Energy/with Federal Lands](#), 9/16/91]

Sansonetti Decision Made it Easier for Interior Department to Proceed with Timber Sales, Endangering the Spotted Owl. Sansonetti, at the Interior Department, wrote a memo to the Endangered Species Committee, known as the God Squad, that received significant criticism from environmentalists. The decision argued that a 9-year-old environmental-impact statement on BLM timber sales in Oregon was sufficient to meet legal requirements and the God Squad had no responsibility to review its adequacy. The environmental-impact statement was completed seven years before the spotted owl was protected as a species threatened with extinction and at a time when knowledge about the bird and its habitat demands was limited. [[Orange County Register](#), 4/18/92]

While at Interior, Sansonetti's Office was Investigated by Congress. Congressman Mike Synar initiated more than one investigation regarding Solicitor Thomas Sansonetti's office. A spokesman for the Interior Dept. said the department had received a letter from Synar last week regarding "an employee of the solicitor's office," but he also declined to

provide any further explanation. Sansonetti was unavailable for comment. [[Inside Energy/with Federal Lands](#), 9/28/92]

OTHER KEY FACTS ABOUT SANSONETTI:

- **Sansonetti Was A Member Of Conservative Legal Organization.** Sansonetti has been a member of the Federalist Society, an influential conservative legal networking group, and has chaired its subcommittee on endangered species. [[Los Angeles Times](#), 6/24/01]
- **Sansonetti Served In The Office Of Congressman Craig Thomas In The 1990s.** Sansonetti served as chief of staff and legislative director for Representative Craig Thomas, who later served as a senator. [[Energy Daily](#), 4/5/01]
- **Sansonetti Maintained Strong Ties With Vice President Dick Cheney For Several Years.** Sansonetti sought the GOP nomination in the special election called to fill the House seat vacated by Cheney when Cheney took the job of defense secretary in 1989. Cheney got him to join the Bush transition team late last year, serving as head of a unit recommending top officials for Interior. [[Scripps Howard News Service](#), 4/5/01]
- **In The Final Hours Of The George H. W. Bush Presidency, Sansonetti Was Named To A New Western Water Review Commission.** In the closing days of the first Bush Administration, Administration officials paced a newly created “Western Water Review Commission” with like-minded appointees. The commission was to review how to improve the federal water bureaucracy. The White House tapped two former Interior Department solicitors, including Tom Sansonetti, along with ex-Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Ralph Broadbent to serve on the commission. [[Sacramento Bee](#), 8/2/93]
 - **The Extremely Late Action Sparked Controversy On Capital Hill And In The Clinton Administration.** Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, in a brief telephone interview, voiced unhappiness over what he termed the “midnight nominations” and suggested that a fresh commission may be named. The appointments, when discovered, raised eyebrows and some hackles on Capitol Hill. This was no ordinary commission, and these were no ordinary appointees. [[Sacramento Bee](#), 8/2/93]

Sansonetti Criticized Clinton Administration’s Establishment Of The Office Of Environmental Protection. Sansonetti criticized the lack of a lot of private business experience for the appointments in the Clinton Administration who deal with environmental issues. In fact, the only appointee for which Sansonetti had high hopes was chief of staff Tom Collier, who at the law firm of Steptoe & Johnson had business clients. [[Inside Energy/with Federal Lands](#), 3/22/93]