

**Statement of
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House Committee on Natural Resources
Oversight Hearing
On The
Bureau of Land Management Realignment**

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Introduction

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Secretary’s vision for realignment of the Bureau of Land Management (“BLM” or “Bureau”) and its personnel. Realigning the Bureau of Land Management’s human resources closer to the lands and resources it manages has been of significant interest not only to Congress, but also its constituency of states, tribes, and local communities. The Bipartisan support the realignment has received recognizes a number of significant benefits, ranging from more informed decision-making to increased efficiency and coordination. This realignment is an important undertaking that is long overdue.

Background

When Congress created the position of Deputy Secretary (then Under Secretary) for the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) in 1937, it was envisioned that DOI would maintain a significant human presence in the West. Congress recognized then that the ability of the Secretary of the Interior to fulfill his statutory responsibilities was enhanced greatly by the location of federal personnel across the vast federal lands for which they are responsible. It was true in 1937; it is even more true today.

Congress was not alone in that realization. Over the decades, western governors, tribal leaders, and rural residents, represented by mayors, commissioners, and citizen groups, have chafed at the fact that in order to address matters of critical importance to them, they had to travel to Washington, D.C. to make their case. Although many BLM employees live in the West and are fellow residents, neighbors, and even friends, most are not the ultimate or even the most senior decision makers. Instead, nearly half of the Bureau’s 24 SES employees, over 60 percent of the 79 current GS-15 positions, and nearly half of the 265 GS-14 positions are located in Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, through the years, the requirements imposed upon federal land managers have increased dramatically, as a result of acts of Congress, rulemakings by agencies, and numerous judicial decisions. While other land management agencies face similar challenges, BLM is unique because it is also responsible for 245 million surface acres, almost exclusively in the American West, and for 700 million mineral subsurface acres, primarily west of the 100th Meridian. To comply efficiently with its land management obligations, there is no substitute for being on the ground to see the land and know its people, and to develop a sense of the local impacts of BLM's decisions in a deeper and more meaningful way than one can do as a visitor.

The case for implementing Secretary Bernhardt's plan is compelling and the timing is fortuitous. Today, the BLM faces a stark choice: either it must relocate most of its positions and personnel to State Offices and a new headquarters in Grand Junction, Colorado, or it must consolidate, into limited and costly space in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Because BLM's lease on its M Street, S.E. location near the Washington National's baseball stadium expires on December 31, 2020, time is of the essence. Therefore, Secretary Bernhardt seeks not only to maintain the BLM's State Office structure, but also to strengthen the Bureau's organization at the state level.

Secretary Bernhardt maintains that meaningful realignment is not simply about where functions are performed; rather, it is rooted in how changes will better satisfy the needs of the American people. Therefore, Secretary Bernhardt required that any realignment must achieve the following objectives:

- Delegating more responsibility to the field;
- Maximizing services to the American people; and
- Increasing the Bureau's presence closest to the resources it manages.

After months of careful planning, consultation with those affected both inside and outside of the BLM, and reflection, those objectives will be achieved through the following actions, which are now underway:

- Maintaining the necessary core BLM headquarters functions in Washington, D.C.;
- Optimizing the efficiency of some headquarters positions currently based in Washington, D.C. by relocating them to the State Offices across the West that their work supports;
- Allocating certain positions to State Offices to perform State Office functions; and
- Establishing a BLM Western Headquarters in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Secretary Bernhardt appreciates the enthusiastic response from western Governors, Senators, Members of Congress, and state and local officials who have long recognized the important role BLM State, District, and Field Offices provide in supporting the needs of their constituents. They recognized that, under Secretary Bernhardt's realignment, the expectation is that BLM operations in every Western State will gain additional human resources, which will be invaluable as BLM serves the American people more efficiently and advances the their multiple-use, sustained yield mission more effectively.

Realignment in Detail

BLM assessed and analyzed each position currently performing headquarters-specific functions both in Washington, D.C. and in the field. A total of 550 positions were evaluated, 166 of which are already assigned to locations in the field. Of the total 550 positions, 74 will be allocated to the BLM State Offices, leaving 476 positions performing headquarters duties.

Under the BLM's implementation plan, the Deputy Director of Policy and Programs will remain in Washington, D.C., along with 60 staff who will continue to perform functions in the Main Interior Building that are inherently and logically located in Washington. For example, a majority of the Bureau's staff who directly inform and perform duties tied to its budgetary responsibilities will continue to remain in Washington, D.C. as will a majority of the staff performing functions in its Legislative Affairs, Regulatory Affairs, Public Affairs, and Freedom of Information Act divisions.

Two hundred and twenty-two positions currently performing headquarters duties in Washington, D.C., will continue to accomplish these functions while being based in locations throughout the BLM's western regions and landscapes in order to optimize the BLM's presence where the needs are greatest.

Given the need for additional technical experience in the field, the Bureau will allocate 74 headquarters positions, some of which have been vacant and unfilled for several years, to perform critical duties closer to the Bureau's resources in its State Offices. The resources available for these positions will be realigned to the budgets of the appropriate State Office to address immediate needs and priorities. For example, the BLM proposes dispersing additional planning and environmental analyst resources, which formerly performed key functions for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews at headquarters, to states with environmental analyses in process, ranging from Colorado to Oregon. Given that under Secretary's Order 3355 the responsibility for this work has shifted to BLM State Directors, it is important to allocate these resources to State Offices. In determining the proper allocation, BLM consulted with State Directors on their staffing necessities.

Lastly, the BLM Director, Deputy Director of Operations, Assistant Directors, and a few selected members of their staffs, totaling 27 positions, will be located in Grand Junction, Colorado, as part of an initiative to establish a Western Headquarters.

The Benefits of Relocation to the West

A. Enhanced Management, Oversight, and Communication

Relocating staff to State Offices and leadership to a Western Headquarters will strengthen the Bureau's organizational effectiveness in order to better achieve its multiple-use, sustained yield mission under FLPMA.

B. Improved Customer Service and Partner/Stakeholder Engagement

Currently, required travel creates a burden for BLM stakeholders to interact directly with BLM executives. Closer physical proximity of BLM leadership to Bureau stakeholders and constituents will improve Bureau operations and decision-making. Strong relationships with Western States, communities, and other partners in states and regions are important for effective communication.

C. Increased Functionality

The vast majority of the functions the BLM performs are located in the Western U.S., including many of its highest priority programs. Relocating BLM leadership closer to their activities in which the agency engages will provide greater understanding of the needs on the ground and better facilitate meaningful policies

D. Potential for Reduced Leasing Costs and Consolidation

Relocating staff will lead to a more efficient operation and substantial cost savings for the Bureau. Perhaps the most striking savings is in lease space costs. With the location of a Western Headquarters in Grand Junction, which has affordable leasing options, BLM can achieve cost savings while increasing the Bureau's leadership presence closest to the resources it manages. As part of its examination, the BLM compared and analyzed lease space based on the General Services Administration (GSA)'s lease rates per square foot data for the Main Interior Building (MIB) in Washington, D.C., and an office location in Grand Junction, CO. The costs for 27 staff identified as part of the establishment of a Western Headquarters are as follows:

- \$50.00/per square foot for the MIB;
- \$32.35/per square foot for an office space in Grand Junction.

The lease rates are specifically of immediate importance right now because the BLM is at a crossroads for its Washington, D.C. office. Currently, employees in Washington, D.C. are located in two facilities; the MIB on C Street in Northwest D.C., and the 20 M Street building in Southeast D.C. The lease for the M Street location expires at the end of calendar year 2020. A renewed lease for the M Street location is not an option, as the new rate would exceed \$50 per square foot – a cost that is substantially greater than is currently being paid and much higher than would be offered in Grand Junction.

For the 296 positions that will be relocated to the West and allocated to State Offices, existing office space in State, District, and/or Field Offices will be used to house staff, resulting in no incremental space costs as opposed to the real expense of moving these positions into the MIB. In the event that additional lease space does need to be acquired by State Offices, estimated commercial lease costs per square foot range from approximately \$14.00/per square foot to approximately \$32.00/per square foot, which will offer a significant savings compared to the MIB square foot costs.

E. Decreased Travel Expenses

For fiscal year (FY) 2018, BLM employee travel between Washington, D.C., and Western states totaled more than \$3.2 million. Relocating staff to State Offices and establishing a Western Headquarters will significantly decrease travel expenses.

Establishing a Western Headquarters in Grand Junction will improve travel efficiency by reducing the number of long cross-country flights, which results in shorter trips and will allow more opportunities for day trips in some areas. Shorter duration travel is more efficient, cost-effective, and is expected to increase productivity with increased time spent on work activities rather than travel. The alignment of staff to State Offices across the West will also result in similar benefits.

The BLM's training centers, located in Phoenix and Boise, are important resources for agency staff. These centers also provide space for meetings and conferences that many BLM staff already attend. The location of the training centers allows easy access by BLM and other DOI staff located in Western cities. Shorter direct flights, or drives, could replace long, cross-country trips. Relocation would also enable BLM leadership to more easily attend trainings and meetings and provide leadership perspectives for attendees. By locating staff closer to the training centers, this enhances opportunities for career development.

F. Reduced Personnel Costs

Relocating staff from the expensive Washington, D.C, metropolitan area, to areas with a lower cost of living will also create increased purchasing power for employees, and reduce personnel costs for the BLM at the same time, due in part to lower locality pay rate adjustments. For example, locality adjustment rates for Western locations range from 15.67 percent to 26.30 percent, while the Washington D.C. locality pay adjustment is 29.32 percent. These savings extend to both the Western Headquarters and State Offices where employees will be relocated and aligned.

Ultimately, a Western Headquarters will maximize services to the American people while increasing the BLM's presence closest to the resources it manages.

Implementation

Implementation of the FY 2019 spend plan will utilize the \$5.6 million BLM funding allocation in the Department of the Interior's reorganization efforts. The initial relocation of approximately 27 employees to the BLM's Western Headquarters will be achieved through voluntary reassignments, providing commitments are secured. Once there is a commitment, the Bureau would issue the employee transfer orders, which will allow employees to work with the agency travel office to estimate moving costs and obligate the necessary funds for the permanent change of station (PCS). Positions that are currently vacant will be advertised in Grand Junction. Directed reassignments will capture the balance of positions that will establish the Western Headquarters.

The remaining positions will be relocated to their newly assigned locations in the various State Offices following a similar method. Voluntary reassignments will be made as State Offices

identify space and funds remain available for PCS costs. Currently vacant positions will be advertised in their respective locations. Implementation of relocations and realignments will take place over the next 15 months until the BLM's M Street Office lease expires at the end of calendar year 2020.

Benefits to States

Nearly every Western state, where the vast majority of BLM's lands and programs are located, will realize significant benefits from this realignment by virtue of augmented staffing levels. Collectively, the state-by-state approach to BLM realignment is the most meaningful way to optimize positions across the Bureau's western footprint. States will benefit from the presence of additional staff that possess experience and expertise in performing duties that address headquarters priorities, but who understand how to utilize that knowledge to advance each state's localized, day-to-day operations. More importantly, the Bureau will be better able to serve the American people with an increased staffing presence closer to the resources it manages, which in turn will allow for more informed and locally coordinated decision making.

A few significant examples include:

Arizona: Thirty four positions currently in Washington, D.C., will be relocated to the Arizona State Office and the National Training Center, which is based in Phoenix. These positions will support both national and on-the-ground priority work related to planning, lands, and realty. Five additional positions will also be allocated to the State Office. Given the ongoing work occurring in the State, as well as the training opportunities that the National Training Center provides to employees across the country, the location of these staff members will be integral to educating and empowering the Bureau.

California: Twelve positions currently in Washington, D.C., will be relocated to the California State Office in Sacramento and 8 additional positions will be allocated to the State Office. Because there are a number of solar, wind, and geothermal projects in process in California, and in neighboring Nevada, the primary focus of these positions will be in support of the Renewable Energy Program. Collectively, these positions will be best able to support national policy needs while also providing support to the State Office. Several positions will be derived from the Bureau's Communications directorate to support both national Bureau objectives and the State's emerging media outreach initiatives.

Colorado: Eighty-five positions currently in Washington, D.C. will be relocated to Colorado. Fifty-four positions will be split between the Colorado State Office and the National Operations Center in Lakewood. Twenty-seven positions will be located in the BLM's Western Headquarters in Grand Junction. Four additional positions will be allocated to the State Office. Colorado has diverse resource needs, ranging from minerals to recreation, and it also serves as a hub for the Bureau's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) projects and priorities. As such, positions from nearly every Directorate will be located in the Lakewood offices. This includes Business and Fiscal Resources Management positions, which will allow both the State and the Bureau to benefit from the development of policies and procedures that directly impact day-to-day operations.

The relocation of these positions will also facilitate the transfer of knowledge from senior staff to the next generation through their proximity to State and field office personnel. Relocated staff will be able to provide a shared resource and expertise to support field operations. These employees will be able to take on complex strategic assignments, such as negotiating State Historic Preservation Office protocols and streamlining the policy development and review processes. Having these positions relocated to Colorado will enable these professionals to integrate into existing BLM work groups and networks and improve their functional capabilities.

Nevada: Approximately 67 percent of Nevada's 48 million acres is managed by the federal government. Nevada has several program areas that would benefit from the assignment of headquarters positions to the State Office in Reno. Specifically, the State has a demand for:

- National project management in the minerals program for the Anaconda Mine cleanup under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act;
- National geothermal program management, given that Nevada has the largest program in the Bureau;
- National project management for utility scale renewable energy projects, including interstate transmission lines, and wind and solar energy projects; and
- Additional on-range management of the Bureau's wild horse and burro program, given that Nevada has the highest horse and burro population in the nation.

These specialists will be an asset to Nevada's workforce and will provide strategic planning, mentoring, and knowledge transfer. For this reason, 32 positions currently in Washington, D.C., will be relocated and 17 additional positions will be allocated to the Nevada State Office. Collectively, this realignment will enable Nevada to leverage national program staff where the BLM resources, partners, and public land users are located.

New Mexico: Thirty-two positions currently in Washington, D.C., will be relocated and seven additional positions will be allocated to the New Mexico State Office in Santa Fe to perform priority and understaffed functions. This includes support for the minerals program and support for cultural, paleontological, and tribal programs. Given the significant activity across the State, including the revision of several Resource Management Plans, aligning staff to assist with both functions will benefit the public by having the capacity to leverage resources to promote better coordination, including with our partners on the ground.

Additional advantages specific to New Mexico include:

- Program alignment featuring more hands-on assistance, coaching and feedback;
- Enhanced training with corporate knowledge sharing, which directly bridges to the states.

A number of the allocated positions are specific to communications, human resources, and budget support. These positions are being allocated to the State Office to expand its capacity for State-wide communications and enhance support for employees

Conclusion

The implementation plan will delegate more responsibility and authority down to the field, optimize services available to the American people, is demonstrably cost-effective, and will provide an increased presence closer to the resources the BLM staff manages. This is achieved through the following actions:

- Maintaining the necessary core headquarters functions in Washington, D.C.;
- Optimizing the efficiency of positions currently based in Washington, D.C. by relocating them to the State Offices across the West which their work supports;
- Allocating positions to State Offices to perform essential State Office functions;
- Establishing a Western Headquarters in Grand Junction, CO.

The redeployment of the BLM's headquarters functions to Western locations is beneficial for the BLM's employees, the constituents they serve, and for every American taxpayer. The savings generated from reduced costs for facilities, travel, payroll, leases, etc., are significant. In addition, this initiative brings employees closer to the land they manage, which will result in more informed and better coordinated decisions made in the work the BLM does, so that land management decisions affecting the way of life for residents across the West will now be made and advised by staff based in the West, not in Washington, D.C.

This effort represents the Department of the Interior's role in fulfilling Congress's commitment to the West more than 82 years ago by properly aligning the BLM's function with its resources and constituents. We welcome the committee's interest in the BLM realignment, we appreciate the support members of the committee have expressed, and we look forward to working with you as we proceed with implementation.