

## **Montana/Dakotas' Travel Policies and Guidelines**

### **July 2008**

#### **Airlines:**

- Northrop-Grumman's GovTrip/SATO is the authorized travel management service for the DOI and is the only travel management service authorized for use in booking travel reservations for travel on behalf of the BLM. Use of unauthorized web-based travel services is prohibited by 41 CFR §301-50.3. See IM BC-2007-008.
- BLM travelers should book the lowest cost airfare that meets the needs of the BLM and is consistent with the FTR, DOI and BLM policy.
  - Travelers are encouraged to research flight options for the most cost effective fares. This includes checking non-refundable airline tickets (under the "Non-Government" tab in GovTrip).
  - Changes and costs associated with changes to non-refundable fares are determined by the airlines and travelers need to be aware of the restrictions prior to booking the tickets.
  - It has been reported that some government fares are currently cheaper than non-refundable fares, please check all options before you book.
- Avoid planning travel at or near major holidays when prices may be higher.
- Book flights 14 to 21 days in advance to take advantage of lower fares and avoid fare increases.
- If a traveler is in travel status and needs to make a change to their airline reservation, they should call the airline directly to make the change. Other than change fees associated with non-refundable tickets, airlines do not normally charge a fee for changing a reservation. If the change is done through SATO, the \$27.75 fee will apply.
- When planning your trip, consider all options for travel. For example: If your destination is a location some distance from a large city, is it cheaper to fly into a larger airport and take other transportation (GOV if available or rental car) to your destination rather than to fly into a smaller airport?
- Use the GovTrip Online Booking Engine. Travelers are encouraged to book their reservations online rather than calling SATO to book their reservations. The BLM is charged \$4.60 for each reservation booked online and \$27.75 for each reservation phoned in to SATO.
- Baggage Charges. Travelers are encouraged to check the airline's policy regarding excess baggage as many airlines are beginning to assess additional fees for baggage. If additional baggage is necessary for official travel, it must be noted and approved in advance on the travel authorization.

#### **Rental Cars/Taxis/Shuttles:**

- Rental Cars. Travelers should only consider rental cars after other transportation options (e.g., taxi, shuttle, ride-share, etc.) have been explored. If a rental car is justified, it must be approved on the travel authorization prior to departure.
- Compact Rental Cars. Travelers are required to get a compact rental car unless there is a legitimate need to rent a larger vehicle. Approving officials have the flexibility to override the size, based on operational needs, safety, weather, physical needs of the employees or other considerations such as transporting passengers. If the approving official approves the size exception, it must be justified and approved on the travel authorization prior to departure.

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- Public Transportation/Taxi/Shuttle/Ride-Share. Whenever possible, use public transportation, taxi, shuttle, and/or share transportation with other individuals. Shuttles, taxis, etc., get cheaper with each additional passenger. There are also price advantages to purchasing a round trip shuttle ticket rather than two one-way tickets.

#### **Telephone Charges While on Travel:**

- Use a government cell phone, government phone, or government phone card to make telephone calls rather than charging the calls to your hotel room. Many hotels have an access charge which increases the cost of phone calls.
- Telephone cards can be obtained through the State Office Telecommunications staff.

#### **Use of Government Owned Vehicles (GOV) and Privately Owned Vehicles (POV):**

- Use a GOV whenever possible. They don't count against our travel ceiling.
- Managers must determine what mode of transportation is the most advantageous to the government and ensure employees use that mode of transportation or that the employee be reimbursed at the appropriate POV rate as set forth in the FTR. For direction on the use and reimbursement of POV see [Chapter 301, Subpart D – Privately Owned Vehicle \(POV\)](#) of the FTR.
  - If a GOV is available for the traveler to use and they elect to take their POV, reimbursement to the traveler shall be at the middle mileage rate which is currently set at 28.5 cents per mile. [See FTR §301-10.310 paragraph \(a\).](#)
  - If you are “committed” to using a GOV such as law enforcement vehicle or other special-equipped vehicle specific to your needs or position, and you choose to take your POV, you will be reimbursed at the lowest mileage rate which is currently 12.5 cents per mile. [See FTR §301-10-310, paragraph \(b\).](#)
  - If there is no GOV available for your use and your supervisor determines the cost of providing a GOV would be higher because of unusual circumstances, they may allow reimbursement not to exceed the high mileage rate currently set at 50.5 cents per mile. [See FTR §301-10-310 paragraph \(a\).](#)
- Employees who pick up mail or run official errands should use a GOV when one is available and when it is determined to be in the best interest of the government.
- Employees taking a POV from work to go to the airport should consider asking another employee take them in a GOV. Mileage and parking expenses could be saved.

#### **Hotel Rates:**

- Travelers are reminded to check the allowable per diem rates of the location to which they are traveling to ensure they do not exceed the maximum allowable rate for that location.
- GovTrip has the option to book hotel reservations online. You should select FedRooms whenever possible as they are within the allowable lodging rates as set in the FTR. However, if offered, other rates are also listed for the hotel and you may find a less expensive rate, which you can choose. Booking hotels through GovTrip for rural locations is usually not a good option as not many, if any, hotels will show up in the search.

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- Travelers need to be aware that the “government rate” offered by some hotels may be higher than the rates allowed by the Federal Government. When offered a room at a “government rate” be sure and check exactly what that rate is to ensure the rate is within the lodging limitations set in the FTR.
- If a traveler is unable to book a room within the maximum lodging rate for the area to which they are traveling, they must have an approval memo from their supervisor and the excessive room rate must be approved in advance on the authorization. There are emergency situations or others situations where the employee may not be able to obtain supervisory approval prior to the excessive charges. In those circumstances, the approval memo must explain the circumstances, be approved by the supervisor, and electronically submitted with the travel voucher.
- If you are not required to stay in a specific hotel, check rates at other hotels in the area. Consider any additional transportation costs as part of your analysis.

#### **Meals Provided by the Government:**

- If you are attending a conference where the conference fee covers one or more meals, you must reduce your per diem for each meal provided.
- If you attend any event where a meal is provided by the government, you must reduce your per diem appropriately.

#### **Meetings, Conferences and Workshops (MCW):**

- Washington Office (WO) Planning Target Allocations (PTA)/Annual Work Plan (AWP) Requirements. We understand there are several instances of required travel to MCW in the WO PTA/AWP directives. The state program leads should work with the WO program leads to stress the importance of containing the travel costs for these MCWs.
- National Meetings, Conferences and Workshops. Whenever possible, avoid sending more than one individual to a national meeting or conference. Also, request travel funds from another office (e.g., WO or Center) whenever feasible.
- Statewide Meetings, Conferences, Workshops, and Training. Before planning a statewide meeting, conference, workshop or training, please perform an analysis of the related travel costs. Determine the most cost effective method of delivering the information to a large audience. “Statewide” could be interpreted as involving more than three offices. Also, these events should be planned and advertised well in advance to allow offices to make the most cost effective travel arrangements.
- Keep in mind that any MCW involving thirty or more federal employees with a majority of the participants in travel status must be approved by both the Deputy Director for Operations and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management. Requests for the approval packages for said MCWs are submitted on a biannual basis.

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**Miscellaneous:**

- Are there locations to which you normally fly where it would be feasible to drive?
- Consider teleconferencing or video conferencing into meetings. Video conferencing equipment is available in the State Office. Contact Barb Riveland for scheduling the State Office equipment. There is also Forest Service owned video conferencing equipment located at the North Dakota Field Office and may be available for BLM use. Lynne Ridl is the contact for the North Dakota Field Office equipment.
- Consider coordinating travel with others from your office or coordinating meetings to eliminate several trips.