

**United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
Oversight Hearing on Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service
Law Enforcement**

**Written Statement of the Public Lands Foundation
May 22, 2018**

The Public Lands Foundation (PLF) welcomes the opportunity to submit the following statement to the Committee on the subject of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) law enforcement. Our comments are directed toward the BLM's law enforcement program, however we note that the Forest Service has a very similar program with many of the same issues. The BLM has had a role in providing public safety and natural resource regulatory enforcement on over 245 million acres of public lands managed by the BLM through uniformed law enforcement Rangers and Special Agents for decades. Another 191 million acres of federal land managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS) also has law enforcement officers and agents who provide the same services. These officers protect our natural resources, insure appropriate compliance of resource regulations and statutes, and provide for the safety of the visiting public. Many of the recreating public's first contact with a BLM employee are with a law enforcement ranger and most report it as a positive experience.

The PLF strongly supports the BLM law enforcement program and feels it is necessary to continue to protect the land-using public and the resources. Proper coordination between local law enforcement agencies and the Federal agencies is vital and benefits everyone by providing for mutual assistance in protecting the resources and people.

Until the 1990s, the BLM and USFS law enforcement staff worked for the "on-the-ground" BLM district manager or USFS district ranger. This provided the opportunity to work closely with the local elected Sheriff, state wildlife officers, state fire officials, US Fish and Wildlife Officers, Tribal governments, and other natural resource agencies. This changed with an organizational realignment of the BLM and USFS law enforcement functions within the agencies, under central direction from Washington, D.C. This change occurred for several reasons, however the result of this restructuring led to an unintended disconnect with local law enforcement communities and the agency field managers and impacted the ability of the law enforcement program to focus on the resource protection mission of the agencies. Over time, the reorganization of the agency law enforcement program also created several budgetary and enforcement effort conflicts with the agency field managers. The BLM and USFS managers authorities are limited to their respective agency public lands and associated resources and emergency public safety.

Like any other BLM managed program, the law enforcement program works best when it is staffed and led as closely to the served communities as possible. Every management level of the agency, from the Secretary down to the field manager, should provide appropriate oversight of this important function. Law enforcement needs to be a part of the resource mission of the

agency and not a separate entity. Close coordination between the resource managers and law enforcement is necessary for this to be successful.

The PLF has recently provided several recommendations to the BLM for consideration for improvements in administrative and operational oversight of the BLM law enforcement program. These recommendations would reaffirm the importance of the BLM law enforcement program as part of the BLM mission of natural resource protection and visitor safety, with the location of uniformed law enforcement staff in field office locations where necessary and appropriate. It is also recommended that the BLM continue or expand the use of law enforcement agreements with local law enforcement agencies, especially in locations where urban encroachment law enforcement problems are routinely occurring on adjacent BLM public lands. The BLM law enforcement field staff should also routinely meet with local sheriffs in their areas of jurisdiction. There may also be value in the creation of local Law Enforcement Councils (LECs) comprised of adjoining Sheriffs and agency field law enforcement staff, as noted by the Western States Sheriffs Association.

The BLM law enforcement staff are hardworking, dedicated employees and should be recognized for the good work that they do. There are simply more acres and more land users out there to be protected than the BLM has resources to allocate to protection. There are many examples of where federal and local law enforcement officers have backed each other up and worked well together; many more than examples of where they have not worked as well together as they should have.

The PLF appreciates the Committee holding this hearing to highlight some of the issues and openly debate them. We also support efforts by the BLM to address law enforcement issues and improve coordination with local governments. Now is the time for the BLM Director and leadership from all federal land management agencies to take substantial steps to evaluate the proper role of law enforcement and work to rebuild the relationships that have existed with local law enforcement in the past.

The PLF is a national nonprofit membership organization that advocates and works for the retention of America's Public Lands in public hands, professionally and sustainably managed for responsible use and enjoyment by American citizens. The PLF endorses and embraces the multiple use mission of the BLM. Members are predominately retired employees of the BLM from across the United States and as such have spent their careers dedicated to the sound management of these valuable lands and resources. And, they have personal knowledge of these lands and resources and expertise in their management.

Submitted by Edward W. Shepard, President