



For America's Heritage

Public Lands Foundation

P.O. Box 7226 Arlington, Virginia 22207

September 25, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510-0001

The Honorable Tom Udall, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510-0001

Dear Senators Shelby, Leahy, Murkowski and Udall:

The Public Lands Foundation (PLF) is extremely concerned about Secretary of the Interior Bernhardt's ongoing plan to reorganize the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Not only are we apprehensive about the relocation of the BLM's Headquarters office from Washington, D.C. to Grand Junction, Colorado, we are even more alarmed about the implications of scattering nearly 300 Headquarters positions to twelve State Offices in the West. As an organization whose hundreds of members served in both headquarters and field capacities, we are convinced that the Secretary's plan, if not halted immediately, will prove to be disastrous for the BLM, its stakeholders and the American people.

The Secretary's plan would remove the BLM Headquarters staff and leadership in Washington, D.C., from having a seat-at-the-table with other national agencies within the Department of the Interior. It would also severely weaken the BLM's ability to collaborate with other Federal agencies whose headquarters are located in Washington, D.C. in the development of policies and the implementation of programs for all Americans in the management of our national public lands.

We fully believe this reorganization would functionally dismantle the BLM while ignoring the reality that the BLM is already a western-based agency with 97 percent of its staff in the field and with a structure already in place that is responsive to western constituents and stakeholders.

We question how the Secretary can proceed to implement his full plan absent Congressional authorization and funding through FY 2020 appropriations. The Administration requested \$7.7 million for FY 2020 to fund the BLM's reorganization. The House of Representatives did not include the funding in its FY 2020

Consolidated Appropriations bill (H.R. 3055). The Senate markup for the BLM's FY 2020 appropriations likewise does not provide funding for the Secretary's reorganization plans for the BLM. Of concern is that after a press announcement concerning an agreement on the Senate markup, an Interior spokesperson stated "the BLM relocation is moving full speed ahead."

Nonetheless, while the FY 2020 appropriations process proceeds, the Secretary and the BLM have already:

- Secured leased office space in Grand Junction, Colorado for what the Secretary is now calling the BLM's "Western Leadership Office."

Of concern to us is that 27 positions are slated to be relocated to Grand Junction and 19 of them are apparently vacant and are to be advertised. This clearly demonstrates poor planning on someone's part.

- Notified the Washington Office (Headquarters) employees on September 18th of the city and state where their current positions will be relocated under the reorganization.

This is concerning because many of the people being directed to move have personal circumstances that give them no other option than to resign, retire or leave the agency. This drain of institutional expertise would have serious detrimental consequences for years to come for the management of the country's public lands and minerals.

- Supposedly decided to relocate at least some Headquarters Congressional Affairs positions to Reno, Nevada and then changed that location to Grand Junction, Colorado. In addition, have decided to relocate at least one Public Affairs position (an International Affairs position) to Salt Lake City, Utah.

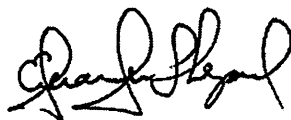
These reported and constantly changing position relocations strongly suggest there really is no "business case" for this plan.

Senator Udall, I also recall the response you received from former Assistant Secretary Balash in response to concerns you raised about the Secretary's plans in which Mr. Balash stated he would "review and reconsider the relocation of additional departmental resources to your state." Again, this strongly suggests there neither was nor is a "business case" for those positions to be relocated outside of Washington, DC. The Secretary has not identified the problem(s) that the reorganization is addressing. Why, after all these years, does the BLM Headquarters suddenly need to be relocated and have its employees dispersed?

As a co-equal branch of the Federal government, it is evident to us that the Congress is speaking clearly to the Secretary through the appropriations process and that the critical action to take at this time is to communicate to Secretary Bernhardt that he must cease further actions on implementing the BLM reorganization and relocation until such time as Congress approves his plans. In addition, we understand that the Secretary is funding his reorganization plans from unobligated, no-year, prior year funds. We urge the Congress to rescind those funds immediately.

Absent a strong message communicated to the Secretary, his plan may be nearly completed by the time FY 2020 appropriations are enacted should the legislative process extend into 2020. Accordingly, I strongly urge you to communicate this message to Secretary Bernhardt immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward W. Shepard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Edward" being more prominent and the last name "Shepard" following in a similar style.

Edward W. Shepard
President