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PUBLIC LANDS ADVOCACY GROUP “STRONGLY OPPOSES” BLM HEADQUARTERS RELOCATION TO COLORADO; SAYS IT WOULD “FUNCTIONALLY DISMANTLE” THE AGENCY

Relocation of the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) national headquarters from Washington, D.C., to Grand Junction, Colorado, would “serve the short-term wants of locally powerful stakeholders to the detriment of all other constituents and the long-term needs of public lands,” according to Ed Shepard, president of the non-partisan Public Lands Foundation (PLF).

His remarks came at a hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Natural Resources on September 10.

“An agency without a strong leadership presence in Washington, D.C., has no input into daily discussions regarding policy, budget, legislation and resolution of issues,” Shepard said. “Under this reorganization plan, the BLM could not ensure the management of public lands for the ‘national interest,’” as required by law.

Further, BLM would be virtually cut off from the top leadership of other natural resource agencies within the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture, he added.

Shepard questioned whether a proper analysis was even conducted by the DOI before announcing the decision.

“This plan is so radical that we question whether it was studied or analyzed by non-political budget analysts or organizational experts and whether career BLM senior management was involved or consulted,” he said.

“We fully believe this reorganization would functionally dismantle the BLM,” Shepard said.

Shepard noted that in recent years, decision authority within BLM at the field level has steadily deteriorated as a result of “unprecedented involvement by the Department and other political appointees.”

If the relocation’s goal is to return decisions to the local level, Shepard suggested DOI “return decision-making authority to local BLM managers who work daily with local communities.” He said that 97 percent of BLM employees already work in field, district and state offices.

Shepard also noted that the purported cost savings of the relocation has not been subjected to rigorous analysis, and that PLF questions if the move will result in any savings.

PLF members believe the relocation and reorganization would further accelerate the departure of many senior employees from the agency, which Shepard said has been dropping precipitously in recent years.

“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,” he said.

In urging the Committee to halt the plan, or at least postpone it until a thorough and independent analysis can be conducted, Shepard said, “What this reorganization plan will do is sideline the BLM from any influence in national public lands policies … and hinder the multiple-use, sustained-yield mission on these public lands.”

PLF is a non-profit, non-partisan organization with more than 600 members, most of whom are retired BLM employees. They represent a “unique body of experience, expertise and knowledge of public land management,” Shepard said. “The PLF is not political; our members have proudly served BLM Directors of both political parties so our perspective is based on decades of on-the-ground experience.”

The full text of Shepard’s remarks can be found at: www.publicland.org.

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