

Public Lands Foundation Transition Advice

November 30, 2024

In November 2024, the American people elected Donald Trump as our new President. As the incoming administration prepares for the upcoming four-year term and takes on the job of managing our natural resource heritage, we would like to provide advice regarding America's public lands based on our experience as technical experts, managers and users of the public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This advice is offered for the use of the transition team during the period when the Trump administration is getting its feet on the ground.

The Public Lands Foundation (PLF) is predominantly made up of retired BLM employees with collectively thousands of years of experience in public land management. We deeply care about the Nation's public lands and the public servants who are entrusted to manage them for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Our advice is as follows:

1. **Support the BLM Organization** – BLM is a very small organization with a very large mission. The agency manages 10% of the lands in the United States with a multiple use mission. The Bureau budget is approximately \$1.7 billion annually, however, it deposits \$8 billion to the treasury each year from mineral and other receipts. Approximately 30% of the mineral production in the US is located on public lands. The BLM employees are almost entirely located on the ground in State and Field Offices in the western states where the bulk of the public lands are located. These employees can help you accomplish your goals if you seek their input and take advantage of their experience and natural resource knowledge. We respectfully request that you recognize that efforts at reorganizing the agency will expend valuable agency time and staff resources from accomplishing other higher priority land management and resource program goals of the administration.
2. **Help the BLM Become More Efficient** – Employees of the agency are asked to follow many processes as they accomplish their land use planning, permitting, and management activities. Those processes should be reviewed looking for more efficient timelines and outcomes. Land Use Plans should not take 10 years to develop with all of the cooperators working together. Permitting streamlining should be considered. For example, we believe authorization of an Application for Permit to Drill (APD) should not need to undergo the environmental review process mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) at three different levels (planning, leasing, and permitting) as is currently the case. Each level becomes very time consuming. We recommend the transition team look at the NEPA requirements, the land use planning process, and the various governing regulations and seek the counsel of senior managers and resource specialists to get their recommendations to improve processes and fine tune the organization to assist in efficient management.
3. **Maintain and Enhance the Delegation of Authority to the Field Level** – BLM is organized with most of the employees located in the 175 State and Field Offices throughout the western states. Most resource management decisions are made and implemented at the State or local level through a delegation of authority. This has proven to be a very efficient model that should be maintained or enhanced. This is significantly different than most Federal agencies that are located regionally. This field oriented model allows for a more collaborative process resulting in much less controversy. Because the BLM offices are located within western communities, the employees are able to work diligently with local and State Government, interested parties and

cooperating agencies to find common ground as the issues are unique based on location. We recommend reviewing the delegation of authority and assuring that it remains robust and well understood. Functions remaining in Washington, D.C. should appropriately be those associated with developing budget, establishing policy, and coordinating activities with Congress, the Department, other agencies, and public land interest groups and organizations.

4. **Manage Public Lands for Resiliency to Withstand Wildfire, Invasive Species and Disease** - Fire and invasive species are two of the most significant threats to our public land forests and rangelands. These threats do not stop at land ownership boundaries, and are risks to private, State, and Tribal lands in addition to public lands. We suggest the administration convene a broad based working group to establish immediate and long term actions to deal with this crisis. The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy and the unanimously agreed to recommendations of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Council can be used as a base to build upon.
5. **Support the Agency in Managing the Exploding Recreation Use on Public Lands** – Recreation use on public lands is a significant economic driver in western communities. It comes in the form of hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, camping, off highway driving, etc. The use occurs in developed sites, along trails and waterways, or dispersed across 245 million acres of public lands. We recommend that you evaluate the extensive growth in the recreation program and assist the agency with a strategy that works in collaboration with local communities and results in constructing additional developed sites, securing easements to access landlocked public lands, and staffing and managing the heavily used areas to resolve ongoing resource damage, trash dumping, and sanitation issues. Fifty-seven million people now live within 25 miles of public lands, so this situation is literally in many American’s back yards.
6. **Request PLF Assistance and Advice** – The PLF supports multiple use management of the public lands under the Federal Land Management and Policy Act of 1976. With hundreds of members (mostly retired BLM employees) located throughout the United States, the PLF has a wealth of knowledge regarding the BLM processes and the lands and resources managed. We are ready and willing to assist the new administration in your successful transition and look forward to hearing from you.

Mary Jo Rugwell
President, Public Lands Foundation
mrugwell@publicland.org