

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0603

December 9, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
1849 C. Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

We write in strong opposition to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) current reprogramming request that seeks to move the BLM Headquarters and significant personnel to Washington D.C. and ask that you rescind this significantly flawed proposal.

The BLM is responsible for overseeing 245 million acres of surface area and 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate, primarily out West. In fact, over 99 percent of the surface area managed by the BLM is located in the Western half of the United States. Agency decision-making and public land users both benefit when Bureau employees are closer to the land they are responsible for managing and are a part of the local communities impacted by their decisions. The establishment of the headquarters in the West reduced the number of long cross-country flights and travel costs, improved training, delegated more responsibility to employees in the field, increased operating hours due to proximity of time zones, improved customer service and coordination with local communities, ensured better decisions earlier in the decision-making process, reduced commute times for employees, and provided good-paying local jobs. In addition, the number of Asian and Hispanic employees within the BLM workforce increased following the move West by 18% and 16% respectively.¹

Unfortunately, the reprogramming effort now being pursued by your Department lacks transparency, is fundamentally flawed, and should be abandoned. BLM has made clear that this new reprogramming proposal will relocate senior staff further away from the lands they are responsible for managing and cause significant harm to local communities by moving nearly 50 good-paying jobs currently stationed in Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico to Washington D.C. While the agency has indicated that moving all these positions to Washington D.C. will cost taxpayers millions of dollars, BLM has failed to provide an accurate estimate of the total costs of this relocation request. The Bureau also indicated that another 45-80 positions, currently assigned to Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming, California, Utah, and Colorado, will likely be moved back to Washington D.C. in a subsequent reprogramming request that will only cause further upheaval and negatively impact employees and Western states.

This reprogramming request stands in stark contrast to earlier public commitments made by the Department and Bureau. In its September 17, 2021, press release, DOI stated, “[u]nder this plan, the BLM’s current presence in Grand Junction, Colo., will grow and expand as the bureau’s official Western headquarters.”² This promise was also consistently made to Colorado’s Governor and bipartisan delegation. Reducing the number of positions assigned to Grand Junction from 41 to 16, while only physically assigning one new permanent position fails to uphold that commitment. It also completely disregards BLM’s previous statements that numerous employees “are interested in keeping their positions

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104247.pdf>

² [Secretary Haaland Outlines Next Steps to Rebuild Bureau of Land Management | U.S. Department of the Interior \(doi.gov\)](#)

out West.” In addition, the Bureau has failed to release the detailed responses from their BLM-wide employee questionnaire on this issue, raising further questions about the transparency of this process. Claims that this move will boost agency moral and functionality have yet to be backed up by any actual data from your agency.

We are deeply concerned that the agency is relying on budget gimmicks and failing to disclose the actual costs and details associated with this request.

Less than two years ago, the previous administration spent \$20.3 million on its reprogramming effort that relocated 328 positions out West and established the BLM Headquarters in Grand Junction, Colorado. This thoughtful and transparent reprogramming effort yielded strong benefits for taxpayers, the agency, and outdoor enthusiasts that utilize our public lands. The agency estimated it would save approximately \$5 million annually in salary and lease cost savings from the move West. The Department of the Interior also reported that it saved \$1.9 million on travel costs in fiscal year 2020.

That move cannot simply be undone. The lease for the Bureau’s M Street building where BLM employees previously worked in Washington D.C. has expired and the space is no longer available. The Bureau stated that it plans for all the new positions that are relocated to Washington to now be stationed in the Main Interior Building. While the agency indicated that significant remodeling costs may be necessary to make those accommodations, BLM failed to articulate how much this remodeling effort will actually cost. The Bureau also failed to include any estimates of the costs associated with higher leases and higher locality pay in Washington D.C.

Finally, the timing of this reprogramming request is misguided and will do even greater harm to BLM employees. Although the Department indicated it would not move employees until fiscal year 2023, this announcement and reprogramming request has created substantial uncertainty and will upend the lives of current employees living out West. Given that most of the agency is still teleworking due to the COVID-19 pandemic, moving headquarters now would only serve to disrupt employees lives and would do little to actually improve the functionality of the BLM.

This reprogramming request appears to be a politically motivated effort, not based on the merits, that fails to consider what is actually best for taxpayers, Americans that utilize our public lands, and agency functionality. In short, this new reprogramming request causes further uncertainty and lacks transparency. We respectfully request that the Department of the Interior rescind this reprogramming request and keep BLM headquarters where it belongs, in the West.

Sincerely,



Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Scott Perry
Member of Congress



Louie Gohmert
Member of Congress



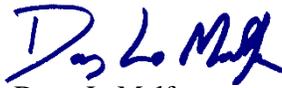
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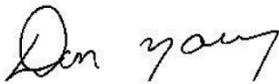
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