



REPORT: Trump Administration's Deliberate Attempt to Eviscerate The Bureau of Land Management

Overview

Interior Secretary David Bernhardt [announced](#) the decision to move the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) headquarters out of Washington D.C. to Grand Junction, Colorado, and other Western cities on July 16, 2019. But what does that mean for this critical public lands management agency, not only for the long-serving staff and the institution itself, but also for America's outdoor heritage?

Moving the BLM out of Washington D.C. has long been a goal of the Trump administration, originally pushed by former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke -- who [proposed](#) moving the agency on his first day within the Trump administration. Scandal-plagued Zinke resigned in disgrace, leaving then-Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt with the [blueprints](#) for BLM's move and the reorganization of Interior.

After continually promising to release a plan for the move, Secretary Bernhardt partnered with Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO) and, in mid-July, [officially](#) announced that the BLM would relocate its headquarters to Grand Junction, CO. The announcement was not accompanied by any official plan or even an outlined purpose or business case for the costly and disruptive decision.

It's been more than two months since the move was officially announced, and today, the public is left with more questions than answers about DOI's decision making process, how special interests benefit and how much the move will cost taxpayers.

Sharing an Office With Oil and Gas Corporations? A Public Lands Institution Will Be Neighbors with Special Interests.

After the BLM announced that it had officially signed a lease in Grand Junction, CO, [questions](#) were quickly raised about the location of the new headquarters. The BLM [signed](#) a lease in a building that also houses a Chevron corporate office, a state oil and gas association, and an independent natural gas exploration company -- meaning, the very agency tasked with the multi-use management of our public lands is neighbors with special interests and oil and gas giants.

While Secretary Bernhardt's Interior denies that the current occupants of the building have anything to do with the newly signed lease, his word hasn't been reliable in the past. The office

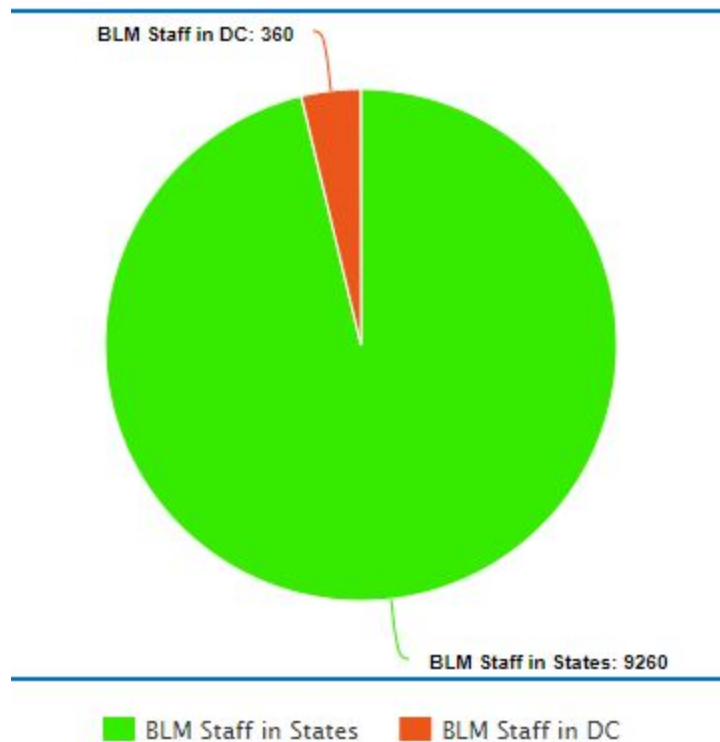


location ultimately underscores just how much the BLM move is intended to give extractive corporations unfettered access to BLM decision-makers.

Lack of Plan or Purpose? Mayhem for Career Public Servants and Wasted Taxpayer Dollars.

The move has all-but gutted the federal agency, leaving employees [outraged](#), [resigning](#), and [transferring](#) necessary institutional knowledge out of the BLM. The move has been [touted](#) as an expansion of jobs in the West. But in Grand Junction alone, only 27 out of 550 jobs will end up being [relocated](#). Other cities, like Reno, Nevada, will [receive](#) some 49 BLM staffers. Ironically, four of those jobs include BLM's legislative affairs employees – whose job it is to work with congressional offices on Capitol Hill.

Coupled with the [fact](#) that 9,260 people or 95 percent of BLM employees already work in states across the country, the BLM move not only lacks a plan -- it lacks a purpose.





President Trump's Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney has [admitted](#) that the intent of the relocation was to force career public servants to quit. The [human](#) cost and [consequences](#) of this move are now clear: a "[mass exodus](#)" of skilled employees booted out, [specific](#) concerns for minority population at the agency ignored, and a stripped-down federal institution that is [intended](#) to manage public lands for single-use, not 'for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.'

Beyond the human cost, moving the BLM is fiscally irresponsible. Interior has [already](#) spent some \$14 million on the reorganization and relocation proposal and [requested](#) an additional \$27 million. Congress denied the funding requests, leaving the question: where will the money to pay for the move come from? What sacrifice will be made so Secretary Bernhardt can accomplish the slow [dismantling](#) of the BLM?

Installing Perry Pendley as Acting BLM Director? The Anti-Public Lands Policy Pushed by Leadership.

President Trump and Secretary Bernhardt have stacked Interior with anti-public lands advocates, many of who have spent their entire lives trying to undermine the organizations they now lead. Previous analysis from the Western Values Project [here](#) and [here](#) highlighted the dangerous trend of anti-public lands zealots hires at the Interior.

The clearest example is [William Perry Pendley](#) who currently runs the BLM and has spent decades working on behalf of special interests and supporting the elimination of public lands.

Pendley believes that all federal public lands should be eliminated, called for the sale of all BLM lands east of the Mississippi, supported the destruction of the Antiquities Act, and has sued the very agency he now runs some 40 times. His role as part of Interior's leadership team is alarming and highlights the undertones and intended purpose of the BLM move.

Having previously argued that the federal government should stay out of the states, Pendley's appointment to lead the BLM and now his work helping the push westward is part of a larger ploy to gut and undermine the agency from within -- and potentially leading to the eventual sale of BLM's public lands.

Ignoring Science, Critical Opinions, and Western Leaders? Fostering a Culture Of Corruption.

The Trump administration has a history of [ignoring](#) scientific findings and [opinions](#) of career public servants. The BLM move has not been an exception to this trend.



While the move has been called into question by [former BLM career public servants](#), members of [Congress](#), and the [Western Governors' Association](#), Interior has made no attempt to address growing concerns.

Instead, Secretary Bernhardt has opted to listen to public land-transfer enthusiasts and industry lobbyists in order to push the BLM out of D.C., away from the negotiating and decision-making table, and into the hands (and office building) of industry special interests.

Transferring Public Lands Management? A Precursor to Privatization

The administration's repeated talking point that decisions will be made closer to the impacted areas and communities is patently false. BLM is already structured to make decisions with input from local communities through public meetings and a public comment process that Secretary Bernhardt has [repeatedly](#) tried to skirt and eliminate.

The [intent](#) is to cede federal public land management authority, also known as 'land transfer-lite,' to state and local governments supportive of the administration's extractive resource agenda. State and local governments typically have a mandate to generate revenue off of lands they manage, very different than that of the [BLMs](#). History has also [shown](#) that transferring federal public lands to state and local governments is a precursor to privatization.

Conclusion

It's clear that moving BLM is a deliberate effort to silence critical voices protecting America's public lands and eviscerate America's largest land management bureau for corporate and special interests. From sharing an office building with oil and gas giants and installing an anti-public lands zealot to run the agency, to wasting millions of taxpayer money, Secretary Bernhardt's push to move the BLM West will have far reaching consequences for decades.

It seems that David Bernhardt intends to still get his orders from the special interests he made a fortune lobbying on behalf of. Despite what he may think, Bernhardt works for the American people and he needs to be held accountable.

Congress should fully use their oversight authority get to the bottom of this troubling BLM move and use the power of the purse to make sure they get the answers we all deserve.