

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes a reprogramming to reestablish a headquarters office in the Main Interior Building in Washington, DC and rename the office in Grand Junction, Colorado, the Western Headquarters office. Although more than 90 percent of BLM's personnel have always been located in the West, the reestablishment of the DC Headquarters office will centralize in one location both the leadership of most BLM directorates and most of the traditional headquarters functions, which include establishing policy, engaging with other Federal agencies, working with Congress, and engaging State, Tribal, and local officials and critical partners and stakeholders. The Western Headquarters office will be staffed by senior BLM officials and will continue to play an important role for BLM, focusing on recreation, restoration, research, and opportunities to engage with stakeholders interested in meeting with BLM in Grand Junction.

In 2019, the vast majority of BLM headquarters positions (including vacant positions)—328 in total—were relocated out of Washington, DC to new duty stations. Of that number, 41 positions were moved to Grand Junction, and the remaining positions were moved to other State and program offices in the West. Despite the large number of positions affected, only 41 people relocated—3 employees to Grand Junction and 38 employees to 10 other State offices in the West—leaving 287 vacant positions. Subsequently, BLM formally reallocated 76 positions to the States and has hired for a significant number of the positions. The abrupt relocation resulted in an enormous loss of personnel and institutional knowledge to the bureau, as well as a significant loss of employee diversity. BLM has not been able to recover from those impacts, as newly hired personnel are in many cases still getting up to speed, and the bureau continues to have approximately 80 vacancies in the various headquarters positions.

As of this date, the 41 positions in Grand Junction include 10 vacancies and 31 people assigned to be physically working at Grand Junction. Three of those employees have not yet relocated and, because BLM remains in a maximum telework posture and is limited to 25-percent office occupancy capacity, a limited number of people are in the office most days. The bureauwide emphasis on telework and remote work over the past 18 months has likely helped BLM function with the challenges of not having people working in the same place and the continuing vacancies in Grand Junction. However, we anticipate, as the bureau returns to the office and people are able to engage in more outward-facing meetings with less time on video conferences, BLM will experience even more challenges from having such a large percentage of leadership in the Grand Junction Headquarters and positions to support headquarters functions distributed around the West rather than in a consolidated location.

In February 2021, the new Department and BLM leadership began to assess and analyze the headquarters staffing situation and committed to working with employees and stakeholders to identify the appropriate position duty stations to best support the mission of BLM while ensuring that employees and stakeholders have an opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts and employees' lives were not disrupted.

Since then, BLM has engaged in extensive outreach, including employee listening sessions; BLM-wide employee and headquarters town halls; a BLM-wide employee questionnaire; a leadership evaluation conducted by former BLM Alaska Director Bud Cribley; assessments of capacity and functionality in day-to-day interactions with personnel; a Secretarial visit to Grand Junction, including discussions with employees; outreach to the Colorado congressional delegation and Governor's office; and meetings with Grand Junction and Mesa County stakeholders. BLM also conducted two formal Tribal consultation meetings.

One of the key takeaways from the BLM-wide employee questionnaire and other engagements is that headquarters functionality was impaired by the loss of experienced staff to both guide and perform work, as well as just not having enough people given the departure of personnel. Respondents also expressed a desire for more leadership: a majority of BLM employees identified the importance of having the BLM Director located in Washington, DC, and did not support having all leadership and headquarters functions in Grand Junction. Employees identified the importance of having BLM leadership colocated in the Nation's capital along with the leadership of other Federal agencies and Congress to truly be part of the decision-making process across the Department of the Interior and the Federal government. BLM has also experienced a significant loss of diversity in its personnel as a result of the 2019 relocation.

At the same time, many Grand Junction Headquarters employees hired into their current locations are concerned they could be relocated to Washington, DC, and are interested in keeping their positions out West. The Colorado congressional delegation and the Governor, as well as Grand Junction stakeholders, have also emphasized the importance of having a fully functioning office in Grand Junction with staff on site and senior leadership represented.

This extensive engagement revealed a need to reconsider the 2019 reorganization and its effect on BLM operations. In particular, the detrimental impacts of the 2019 reorganization on the BLM mission will clearly persist unless urgent action is taken to address the headquarters situation and to fill critical vacancies. To that end, BLM proposes to reestablish the DC Headquarters as an important first step to strengthen BLM's organizational effectiveness and reestablish BLM's capacity to provide excellent service to its constituency of States, Tribes, and local communities. The benefits of reestablishing a DC Headquarters include a larger pool of senior, seasoned applicants available to fill much-needed positions; having senior headquarters leadership in the same location for addressing key issues and setting policy direction; more opportunities for integration across Interior bureaus and organizations on policy and operational issues; increased availability to meet and work closely with external partners located in or who routinely travel to Washington, DC, to interact with the Federal community; and increased efficiency and coordination among the Department's bureaus, the Federal community, Congress, and other stakeholders. Because of all of those factors, reestablishing a DC Headquarters will help to improve BLM's organizational effectiveness and improve BLM employee morale.

At the same time, the Department's leadership believes that maintaining a BLM Western Headquarters will enable the bureau to capitalize on the benefits of having leadership in the West who can engage more frequently with stakeholders and reinforce the Western, on-the-ground perspective as a part of agency decision making. In addition, the Grand Junction/Mesa County region's outdoor recreation economy and experience balanced with a traditional fossil fuel energy economy makes Grand Junction an ideal location for continuing to develop approaches for BLM more broadly, and the focus on research (both academic and in the field) on restoration can provide similar benefits. Further, locating the management of BLM's National Conservation Lands, along with recreation and visitor services, in a Western Headquarters can benefit those programs due to their proximity to parties interested in on-the-ground projects and research.

We anticipate this reprogramming request will affect approximately 50 positions across BLM, as defined below.

BLM has identified 11 critical leadership positions to relocate to DC Headquarters, from Grand Junction and from other Western locations, including the Director; Deputy Director for Operations; five Assistant Directors (Office of Law Enforcement and Security; Resources and Planning; Energy, Minerals and Realty Management; Communications; and Business Management and Administration); and four Deputy Assistant Directors (Office of Law Enforcement and Security; Resources and Planning; Energy, Minerals and Realty Management; and Business Management and Administration). Relocation logistics will be coordinated on a position-by-position basis and in consideration of the recent moves, and current employees with encumbering positions may be offered the opportunity to work remotely but report to the DC Headquarters office. Enclosure 1 contains the current and proposed organization chart with duty stations, and Enclosure 2 contains a list of the positions and estimated average relocation costs.

The Assistant Director and Deputy Assistant Director for National Conservation Lands and Community Partnerships will remain in Grand Junction. BLM is also evaluating the creation of a new Western Regional Leadership Team, comprising existing headquarters and State office staff, and potentially a new Senior Executive Service position that can support the Grand Junction office and would operate virtually from Grand Junction and State office locations initially.

BLM also understands that some BLM headquarters employees whose positions were relocated in 2019 from Washington, DC, to various locations around the West as part of the previous reorganization have not yet relocated for a variety of reasons. BLM proposes, pending discussions with the affected employees, to cancel those relocation orders and have the employees' duty stations remain located at the DC Headquarters office. In addition, BLM proposes to reassign an estimated 31 vacant GS-14 and GS-15 headquarters positions moved out of Washington, DC in 2019 to the DC Headquarters office. Employees in those positions perform typical headquarters roles and provide support across the bureau instead of to specific State, District, or Field offices. Enclosure 2 contains a list of those positions.

BLM will also establish a position, the Assistant Director, Information Management and Technology Directorate, who will report to the BLM Deputy Director of Operations and be located in the DC Headquarters. The position will operate as the BLM Associate Chief Information Officer and provide leadership, direction, and management to effect transformative change in the delivery of technology and information management processes and services, in alignment with the Department's Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) Implementation Plan. Enclosure 1 includes the proposed organizational chart.

Separately, BLM will continue the headquarters organizational review, and leadership will establish an Employee Steering Committee to help assess remaining headquarters positions that are currently in various locations around the West to determine further action. The committee will evaluate the duty stations of approximately 45 currently vacant headquarters positions that are GS-13 and below to determine the best location for those positions as well as develop a lasting, functionality-focused and employee-informed path forward for the BLM organization as a whole. The process will be led by Interior's Office of Collaborative Action and Dispute Resolution, and the Employee Steering Committee will include staff from every major level of the BLM organization, including the Headquarters Directorates; the Equal Employment Opportunity Office; and State, District, and Field offices. A separate committee from the Executive Leadership Team will be appointed to assist as well. Future reprogramming requests will be submitted as appropriate.

This reprogramming will not result in changes to the Committee Support Table or require funding realignments in FY 2021. Further, as stated above, a central commitment of this reorganization effort is to not require employees whose positions will be relocated to the DC Headquarters to relocate immediately, thereby avoiding additional upheaval and using the functionality of remote working that has been developed in the past year.

This proposal is submitted in accordance with the arrangement and understanding the Department has with the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations regarding reprogramming procedures. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Denise Flanagan, Director of Budget, at 202-208-5309 or Denise_Flanagan@ios.doi.gov.