



BLM's HQ Move is a Gift to Special Interests and Industry Lobbyists

On July 15, Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO) [announced](#) that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) would relocate its headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado. Led by Interior Secretary David Bernhardt and Acting Director of BLM William Pendley, the administration has commenced this controversial and unnecessary move that has been widely panned as a way to cozy up even closer to industry special interests.

Bernhardt and Gardner's plan to move BLM isn't an effort to bring jobs out West, it's an effort to gut the public lands bureau so it will better serve their special interest allies. Ultimately, moving the BLM is a reckless, purposeless, and cynical attempt to dismantle the agency by excluding career expertise from the public lands decision-making process.

New BLM Headquarters to Share an Office With Oil and Gas Corporations

The BLM ultimately [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 -- underscoring just how much the HQ move was always meant to give extractive corporations unfettered access to BLM decision makers.

In its newly leased third floor office at 760 Horizon Dr in Grand Junction, CO, BLM Headquarters will be sandwiched between Westslope Oil and Gas Association and Laramie Energy on the first floor and Chevron corporate office on the fourth floor. Key BLM decision makers will be riding the elevator and holding the door for the same oil and gas entities that they are charged with regulating.

Secretary Bernhardt is Playing Politics with Our Public Lands

The BLM Move Does Not Have a Clear Purpose or Plan

The move may sound appealing on paper, and any move to get more input from folks on the ground is a good idea, but that's far from the point of the latest smoke-and-mirrors exercise from the Trump administration. The proposal to move BLM's headquarters is nothing more than a political power grab — backed by no plan and supporting no public purpose — that would undermine the agency's work and waste taxpayer funds in order to help special interests further profit off our public lands.



The Trump Administration Admitted the Move Was an Attempt to Cut Agency Staff

Simply put, Bernhardt isn't relocating the BLM to get more input from the West; he's relocating BLM to hamstring career employees committed to protecting our public lands. Indeed, Trump's Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney recently [admitted](#) that the intent of relocating federal employees was to force them to quit.

Head of the BLM Has Long History as an Anti-Public Lands Zealot

Bernhardt isn't in this alone; he also has anti-public lands zealot William Pendley executing the move. For thirty years, Pendley has been [loud and clear](#) about his stance on public lands: he thinks they should be abolished. And despite having previously [argued](#) that the federal government should stay out of the states, his work moving BLM westward is now part of a larger ploy to gut and undermine the agency from within.

BLM Move Challenged By Career Public Servants, Congress, and Western Governors

The move has been called into question by [former BLM career public servants](#), [Members of Congress](#), and the [Western Governors Association](#). Many believe the move is a not-so-veiled attempt to transfer public lands to states, a precursor to selling them to private interests.

Reckless Spending of Taxpayer Dollars

The Interior already [spent](#) some \$14 million on the reorganization and relocation proposal and has [requested](#) an additional \$27 million that has not yet been allocated. Leaked documents [show](#) that some 49 BLM staffers, including four of BLM's legislative affairs employees – whose job it is to work with member offices on Capitol Hill – would be relocating to the Reno, Nevada, field office, while dozens more are expected to be relocated to Grand Junction, Colorado.

Redundant and Wasteful Decision

Most BLM staff are already [located](#) in state offices out West already while only a small group of experts and legislative affairs staff are based in D.C. The [fact](#) is that some 95% of BLM employees are already based in the states they serve. The remaining BLM employees based in the Washington Office primarily provide relevant support and expertise, including budget, policy, and oversight functions that are best executed in D.C. and would be hindered by being moved to a location out West -- precisely the point of this move.

Taking Critical Voices Out of the Decision-Making Process



There are more than a dozen agencies that have partial jurisdiction over our public lands, such as the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Energy, Department of Defense, Department of Commerce, National Park Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, and others. Failure to maintain BLM HQ staff in D.C. will result in the exclusion of these key leaders on important and real-time discussions and decisions.

If Bernhardt really wanted to improve the effectiveness of BLM, he could start listening to those who know best:

- Career employees and experts who work at BLM;
- Governors and elected officials from Western states;
- The public whose voice DOI has tried [to silence](#) by limiting public comment or ignoring their input entirely.

Interior Leadership has a History of Disregarding Concern

The problem isn't that BLM leadership is based in DC; the problem is that Interior leadership doesn't listen to BLM's professional staff - regardless of where they are. Just a few examples:

[Sage Grouse](#)

- The Trump administration's move to decrease sage grouse protections ignores bipartisan support for protecting sage grouse habitat and neglects to answer the concern that, without the backing of the federal government, mineral industry representatives will now be able to steamroll over sage grouse advocates

[Westlands Water District](#) and [Delta Smelt](#)

- In a move devastating to the California ecosystem, imperiling fish up and down the food chain, and encouraging toxic algal blooms, Bernhardt ignored the strong support of the Endangered Species Act, and decided to benefit his former client, the Westlands Water District, weakening environmental protections in order to take advantage of river water use.

[Arizona Housing Development](#)

- After advising the Interior to halt a potential housing development in Arizona because of potential environmental impacts, a top career public servant was asked to reverse his decision by a senior official at Interior, thereby allowing the housing development plans to continue. The development company's founder has personal ties to Bernhardt.

Scientific report on [pesticides](#) and [ESA impacts](#)



- When pesticides were found to be toxic and potentially deadly to endangered birds, fish, and other plants and animals, political appointees in Bernhardt's Interior made moves to halt the information becoming public.

Climate change

- Bernhardt refused to halt oil and gas drilling even when it presented harm to the climate crisis.

Grazing Leases

- Bernhardt sought to jeopardize federal public lands by opening a discussion to allow oil drilling in spite of areas that are environmentally protected.

Secretary Bernhardt Ignores Agency Experts

Bernhardt's Interior has a record of ignoring career employees and expert scientists. We are all for listening to local voices and hearing from communities. That needs to start at the top. But Bernhardt refuses to actually listen to the employees on the ground, closest to the decisions. On top of that, the Trump administration now wants to [eliminate](#) advisory committees... Will Bernhardt eliminate Resource Advisory Committees and others that provide input from local communities?

More Power Consolidated in Interior Secretary's Office

If the BLM were to leave D.C., each region would be assigned a director who would report directly to the Secretary's Office. This would allow the politically appointed Secretary to control important public land decisions instead of deferring to on the ground employees closest to the decisions and the communities affected by said decision.

Decision Does Not Equate to More State Input

Moving out west with the intent of incorporating more input from Western states is not the reality of this plan nor is it what we believe to be Bernhardt's objective. Nothing he's ever done has shown us otherwise.

Here is What Interior Should be Working On

Bernhardt doesn't need to move a few desks a thousand miles from his office to start listening to the West. He can start by:



- Fulfilling the BLM's public lands multi-use mission, not singularly focused on extractive special interests;
- Working to fully fund the [LWCF](#);
- Increasing accessibility and public awareness by updating BLM's website;
- [Expanding](#) public comment periods, not try to limit it;
- [Maintaining citizen](#) advisory committees; and
- Increasing community engagement through public meetings and collaboration.

What Others are Saying About the BLM Move

- "This is absurd. The Trump Administration literally moved the Bureau of Land Management into an office building with the fossil fuel companies it's supposed to regulate," U.S. Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA) [[Twitter](#), 9/23/19]
- "I personally think that moving the leadership of BLM away from Washington will hurt BLM's ability to procure the funding and decision-making that it needs to thrive in today's federal government ... It seems like a very political thought as opposed to a truly transformative or good government initiative ... It is putting politics over reality, but in a way that will hurt the organization, because those folks in Washington have a role to play, and that is to work the Washington angle for the benefit of public lands, and get the support, budget and stakeholder outreach that is uniquely in Washington, D.C." **said David Hayes, who was the Interior Department's deputy secretary during the Obama administration.** [[Colorado Independent](#)]
- "If they are sending headquarters positions to the West, all of that rapid response and external coordination, particularly in being relevant and responsive to Congress and the White House, that just evaporates," **said Jamie Rappaport Clark, who was director of another one of Interior's agencies, the Fish and Wildlife Service, from 1997 to 2001, and is now president and CEO of Defenders of Wildlife.** [[Colorado Independent](#)]
- "Over 90% of Interior employees already work outside the D.C. region. Is this really a solution in search of a problem?" **said Rep. T.J. Cox (D-Calif.)** [[Colorado Independent](#)]
- "There's no particular advantage to having a headquarters in the American West if your concern is being accessible and close to the people who are concerned about public lands," **said Patty Limerick, who heads the University of Colorado Boulder's Center for the American West.** Furthermore, Limerick sees the decentralized nature of the BLM as an outright experiment whose outcome could ultimately be detrimental to the people the bureau is supposed to serve.... "The BLM has – I guess you could say always been, but is certainly now very decentralized," she said. "To say we're going to further decentralize this



and eliminate the one place where BLM employees and officials have to converge and occasionally check in with each other,” would be taking the experiment to a whole other level. [[Colorado Times Recorder](#)]

- “In the event of a natural disaster or some other kind of emergency, Limerick said it would probably be far harder for an agency without a central headquarters to coordinate an effective response. Furthermore, she characterized the instability from the move itself and the possibility of a fully decentralized BLM as inherently bad for business in the rural West. Limerick said the lack of a steady regime will be particularly problematic for those making their livings off or in relation to BLM-held lands.”
- “Since you can’t physically get in bed with industry, it seems like Bernhardt did the next best thing by moving in next door,” said **Jayson O’Neill, deputy director of the Western Values Project**. “Now the agency tasked with protecting and standing up for our public lands will be rubbing elbows with oil executives and sharing a water cooler with extractive interest allies.” [[Washington Post](#)]
- “I think that the current system is working - sort of that 'if it's not broke don't fix it' mentality,” **Ashley Soltysiak with the Sierra Club of Utah said**. “But there are field offices throughout the West, and they communicate regularly with headquarters. And so I don't see a huge benefit to moving the headquarters west.” ... Soltysiak said the states being considered have large contingents of legislators and other interests who want the states to control federal lands. [[Utah Public Radio](#)]
 - “There's been no dollar sign that's been placed on this reorganization,” she said. “And these types of changes don't come without a pretty major cost, which could be massive for an agency that has already been underfunded and has limited resources.”
- “There is a flaw in the plan, namely that it seeks to address a problem that isn’t fully defined. Instinctively, proximity to the managed land seems a good call. The real issue for many Westerners, though, is making sure all the decision makers in the Interior Department and Congress understand the real topics and problems of BLM lands. An unintended consequence of moving BLM headquarters away from D.C. is that BLM’s leaders are as remote as their lands from the decisions and politics of Washington. That won’t stand, of course, so the next solution will be adding back managers and high functions to the Interior Department in Washington. It looks more like an inevitable expansion, rather than shrinking, of government. A closer, more engaged BLM seems a healthy move. No one



should kid themselves into thinking it would lead to better policy making back in Washington." [[Associated Press Editorial Board](#)]

- “The BLM HQ is best located in close proximity to the Secretary of the Interior, the Department staff, other Federal agency senior staff, Congressional staff and National stakeholder organizations to effectively focus on National issues. Moving the employees in the HQ to a single western location will not aid in the decision-making process and will hinder or eliminate the BLM’s participation in legislative, budget, and policy discussions with the Department and Congress in Washington, D.C. Today, the BLM is well organized to serve both the Washington, D.C. clientele and the western constituents. BLM manages public lands for all Americans in many States and should not be influenced by a single western state.” [[Public Lands Foundation](#)]