



BLM's 'West Side Story'

By Frank Dubois | August 6, 2019

Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO) **went public** with the info on July 15.

The official announcement of the Trump administration's reorganization of the Bureau of Land Management was made via a letter to Congress, as required by law, on July 16.

The BLM Director, Deputy Director of Operations, Assistant Directors and some of their staff, totaling 27 positions, will be relocated from Washington D.C. to Pueblo, Colorado. In addition, 222 employees currently performing headquarters duties will continue to perform those duties but from western states "in order to optimize the BLM's presence where the needs are greatest." An additional 74 technical positions will be assigned to various western states. About 84 percent of the Washington staff will be relocated westerly. New Mexico will receive 32 new positions.

Sixty positions will remain in D.C., including the Deputy Director of Policy and Programs, and those involved in legislative affairs, public affairs and other functions best suited to a D.C. presence.

Environmental groups and elected officials who support a more centralized, top-down, form of natural resource management are having a fit.



Kate Kelly, public lands director for the liberal think tank **Center for American Progress**, says, "The true impact of this move is to make the agency and its leadership invisible in a city where — like it or not — the decisions about budgets and policies are made. The constant shuffling, shrinking and disassembling of BLM's workforce will have long-term implications for the health of the agency."

Like many of the opponents of this move, she seems to care more about the health of the agency than she does the condition of our natural resources or the citizens of the West.

"Any movement like that costs a lot of money, creates a lot of uncertainty and causes angst with employees," said Elizabeth Klein, former associate deputy secretary at the Interior Department during the Obama Administration.

Uh oh, this will cause angst in some of the employees. Is this the same type of angst suffered by ranchers who have had their grazing permits diminished or canceled? Is this the same type of angst suffered by those whose homes and property are destroyed by out-of-control wildland fire? Is this the same type of angst suffered by those who have lost their jobs as a result of some bug or plant that is protected?



Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) says, “BLM leadership must be accessible and accountable to all affected states and to Congress, which sits in Washington. A sudden relocation would also likely mean BLM would shed essential staff, crippling the agency’s ability to carry out its responsibilities to protect and manage our precious public lands. Based on what I know so far, I have serious reservations about this plan...”

Again, more concern about Congress “which sits in Washington”, and federal employees than the residents and resources of the West.

Other opponents are attempting to use the transfer of lands to the states as a reason to oppose this reorganization.

Former BLM Director Robert V. Abbey, who served in the Obama administration says, “It’s just another step that they are taking that will add credence to those advocates that say these lands should be managed by the states.”

“They want to dissolve gradually the federal BLM agency and transfer the responsibility and, more importantly, the assets to states, which robs the rest of the country of an asset they’ve been paying for,” says Patrick Shea, a former BLM Director who served during the Clinton administration.

I wish this were true, but it is not. It is just another arrow pulled from their quiver in a transparent effort to stymie reform. They conveniently forget that then candidate Donald Trump was the only Republican in the presidential primaries to oppose the transfer of certain federal lands to the states.

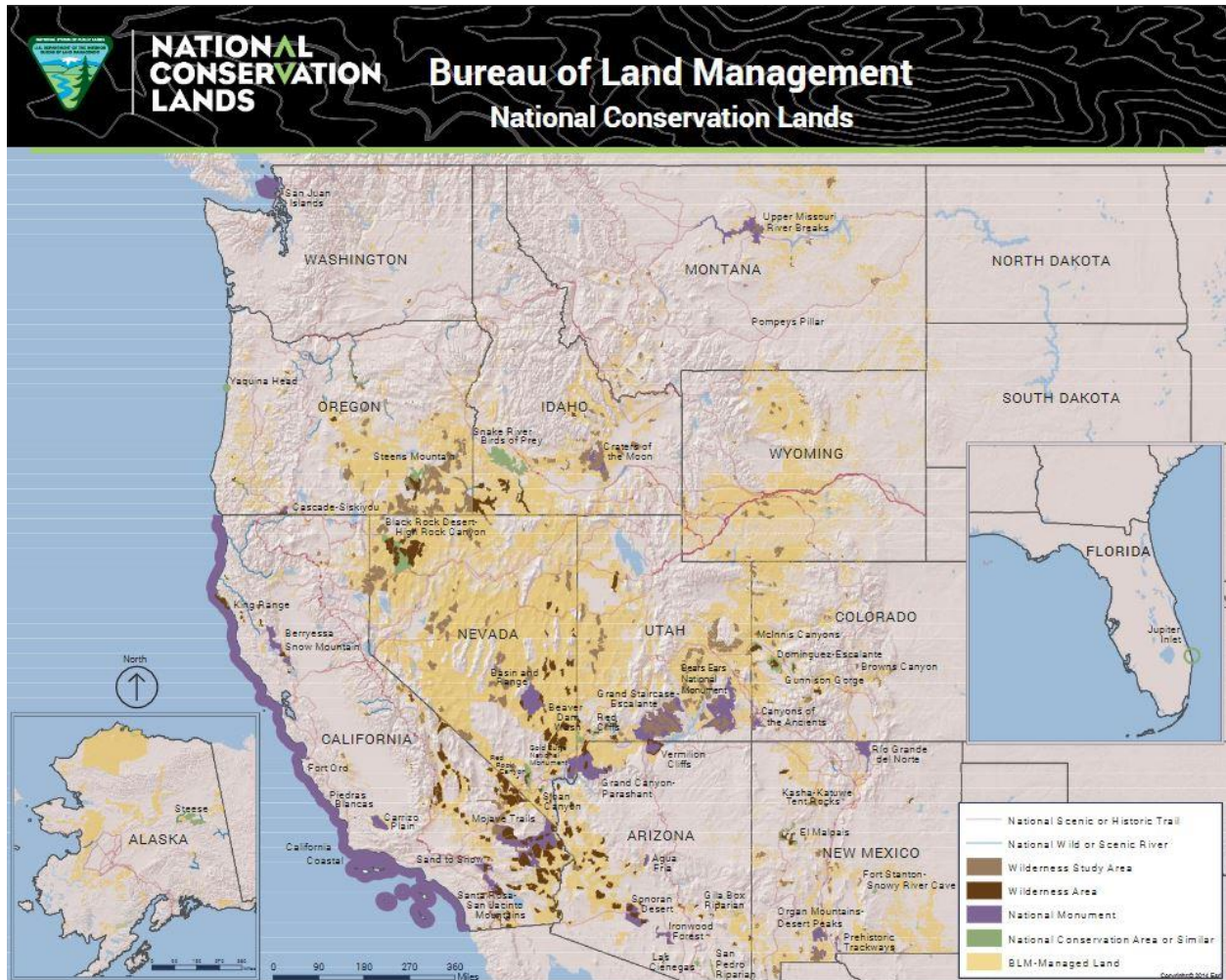
Interior Spokesman Molly Block says, “We are not doing anything to change the legal basis of BLM’s role in land management, or the continued federal ownership of public lands administered out West by BLM.”

Interior says their plan places emphasis on the need to align its personnel footprint with their resources footprint, which is primarily located in the West.

I believe that approach deserves support. It will not come close, however, to solving our problems in the West. As long as the Endangered Species Act, Antiquities Act, NEPA, FLPMA and so on remain intact, we will continue to be harmed. It is the laws that are flawed, not the geographical location of the decision maker. The Republicans had a two-year window to address this, and did nothing. Now, with the Democrats in control of the House of Representatives, it would appear this little reorganization is all we can hope for in the near term. And make no mistake, the enviros and certain members of Congress will do all they can to prevent even this little reform from happening.

I will share with you the real loser in this proposal: The BLM's ego.

David J. Hayes, a former deputy Interior secretary in the Obama administration, says the headquarters move “threatens to devalue the mission and importance of the Bureau of Land Management.”



I can tell you from personal experience in D.C. that the BLM has long been jealous of other land management agency's budgets and programs, especially those of the Forest Service. BLM'ers were very resentful of always being considered a stepchild of natural resource management. Just watch them play copycat to Smokey. The Forest Service had many restrictive land-use designations. The BLM finally convinced Congress to create the **National Conservation Lands** System, along with the accompanying appropriations. The Forest Service and the National Park Service had national monuments, now BLM has them too. The Forest Service had a centralized system of law enforcement. BLM moved their LEO's out from under the State Directors and created a national office. The Forest Service had administratively created roadless areas, and now BLM has administratively created "lands with wilderness characteristics". This struggle to upgrade the personnel and programs of the BLM has received a setback.

That ego is definitely being bruised.

Until next time, be a nuisance to the devil and don't forget to check that cinch.

Frank DuBois was the NM Secretary of Agriculture from 1988 to 2003, is the author of a blog: The Westerner (www.thewesterner.blogspot.com) and is the founder of The DuBois Rodeo Scholarship and The DuBois Western Heritage Foundation

This column originally appeared in the August editions of the [New Mexico Stockman](#) and the [Livestock Market Digest](#).