

## Interior Department Delivers Hundreds of Relocation Notices to Employees

Headquarters staff now has 30 days to accept the reassignment or face removal from the agency.

Eric Katz, Senior Correspondent | November 12, 2019

The Interior Department delivered hundreds of relocation notices on Tuesday, starting a 30-day clock for employees to either agree to move to a location in the western United States or face removal.

The official “management directed geographic reassignments” were delivered in-person today to each of the employees at the Bureau of Land Management headquarters facing relocation. BLM is moving 27 employees to a new headquarters in Grand Junction, Colorado, and about 220 more Washington, D.C.-based workers to field offices in western states. The employees will have until Dec. 12 to agree to their specific new post or they will be placed into removal proceedings.

BLM held an all hands meeting Tuesday morning to go over the details of the plans, according to multiple employees who attended. Staffers pressed management on what extensions might be available as many of those affected are still looking for new jobs in Washington. Top officials at BLM said “special consideration” for more time would be considered on a case-by-case basis and those making such a request must be prepared to provide both a personal and business justification.

Each impacted employee was slated to have a one-on-one meeting with a top BLM official on Tuesday to receive their letter and additional details on the process. If an employee agrees to move, they will have an additional 90 days to arrive at their new duty post. Those who decline the relocation will have certain appeal rights to challenge the resulting termination notice.

BLM told employees the administration has granted its requests to offer early retirement and buyouts to at least some employees who do not relocate. The agency did not offer details on exactly who would qualify, but promised to hold information sessions next week to go over more details of the incentive offers.

Employees currently at BLM have [told Government Executive](#) they know of very few colleagues who plan to relocate, and even some of those who do are still looking for jobs in Washington and will come back home as soon as possible. Many employees have already found new jobs and departed the agency. The workers all suggested morale at the Washington office has plummeted, mistrust of leadership has grown and a sinking feeling that the Trump administration is seeking to sideline important work has set in.

Interior previously said it would provide employees who agree to move 25% of their base salaries as an incentive, as well as free temporary housing in their new locations, but has subsequently [threatened to withdraw](#) those perks due to a lack of funding.

“The BLM relocation is moving full speed ahead,” said Nick Goodwin, an Interior spokesman. “The department intends to give BLM employees their legally authorized compensation and incentives, but ultimately it is up to Congress to decide if they want to deny these benefits to our employees.”

The department has defended the move by highlighting that nearly all of the land BLM manages is in western states, so it makes sense for the decision-makers to be there too. Additionally, Trump administration officials have said the move will lower lease payments, reduce travel costs and generate savings by paying employees smaller cost-of-living locality rates. Employees and other critics of the plan, however, have noted that about 97% of BLM’s workforce is already located in the western United States. Relocating employees out of Washington will make enforcement actions carry less weight, they said, and reduce the influence BLM has within Interior and the rest of the administration.

BLM said as of last week it had no estimate of how many employees will accept their mandated reassignments. The agency will leave several dozen employees in D.C. whose work ties back directly to the capital.

“We sincerely hope employees will be able to follow their positions to the new locations but there are many factors that an individual may consider when deciding whether or not to relocate, so it’s difficult to say at this time exactly how many people will choose to relocate,” said Derrick Henry, a BLM spokesman.

*This story was updated with additional comment from the Interior Department.*