



## Press Releases



Photo by Tami Heilmann, DOI

# SECRETARY BERNHARDT TRANSFORMS INTERIOR'S ETHICS PROGRAM

## Signs Secretary Order Overhauling Ethics Office, More than Doubles Career Ethics Staff

8/14/2019

Last edited 8/15/2019

Date: August 14, 2019

Contact: [Interior\\_Press@ios.doi.gov](mailto:Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov)

**Washington** – Today, U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt continues to follow through on his commitment to transform the Department of the Interior's (Department) ethics program, signing [Secretary's Order 3375](#). The Order doubles the number of career ethics officials hired at the Department since 2017 and restructures the ethics program by unifying 13 disparate Bureau programs into a centrally-managed office. The Order streamlines the reporting structure for ethics personnel, establishes the Departmental Ethics Office, and clarifies roles and responsibilities for the Department's employees.

"Being a public servant is one of the highest callings a person can undertake, and with this responsibility comes the public's trust in all of our actions being ethical. Investigations performed by the Department's Inspector General over the years have highlighted a culture at the Department of the Interior that did not embrace necessary ethical standards, which erodes the public's faith in our work," **said Secretary Bernhardt**. "Transforming the workplace culture at the Department is a top priority for me, and my actions today will help ensure the Department has a functional and resilient ethics program that facilitates our ability to fully embrace a culture of ethical compliance."

Scott De La Vega, a career official who serves as the Director of the Departmental Ethics Office and Designated Agency Ethics Official (DAEO), will oversee ethics operations for the Department. Unifying the ethics programs will ensure the DAEO has overall responsibility

and authority for the Department's ethics program, including the ethics activities of the Bureaus and Offices. This will provide accountability and consistency across all components of the Department.

"This unprecedented expansion and restructuring of the Department's ethics program is not only necessary, but decades overdue," **said Mr. de la Vega**. "The transformation of this critical program into a modern, legally dependable and responsive operation will assist our 70,000 employees in faithfully discharging the duties of their offices with integrity and in compliance with conflict of interest laws and the highest ethical standards."

Under the program's prior structure, the heads of each of the Department's Bureaus and Offices, rather than the DAEO, operated 13 disparate ethics programs with varying staffing and operational standards. At times, some programs operated without any ethics officials in place at all. The new structure will enhance the delivery of ethics services to employees; ensure that program operations are legally sufficient and compliant with ethics laws and regulations; and implement best practices.

"This order represents an ongoing commitment on the part of the Interior Secretary to reorganize and streamline the department," **said Representative Rob Bishop**. "The efficiency, transparency, and consistency promised by this action are the traits of an exemplary operation. I anticipate a successful rollout and hope it can serve as a blueprint for other departments as they look to improve their own practices."

"Secretary Bernhardt has significantly increased accountability within the Departmental Ethics Office. Today's Order builds on that progress by streamlining operations and consolidating bureaucracy. This new format will increase transparency and efficiency at Interior, a welcome change from the previous administration," **said Congressional Western Caucus Chairman Paul A. Gosar**.

Secretary Bernhardt has taken several important actions to improve the ethics program, including recruiting experienced, non-partisan, career ethics professionals with the dedication and leadership skills necessary to establish a best-in-class program. These new employees include the DAEO, Alternate DAEO, Financial Disclosure Supervisor, Ethics Education and Training Supervisor, and Deputy Ethics Counselors at the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other Bureaus and Offices.

"The operational changes, significant increase in ethics personnel, and added resources to the Department's ethics program will undoubtedly be of benefit now and moving forward," **said Secretary Bernhardt**.

Since 2017, the Department has increased the number of full-time, career ethics professionals by 162 percent, nearly doubling the total hired during the entire eight years of the previous administration.

[The Order is accessible](#) online.

[See more by clicking here](#)