

2021 BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT EMPLOYEE SURVEY REPORT

Public Employees for Environmental
Responsibility



PHOTOS CREDIT: BLM.GOV



962 Wayne Ave., Suite 610, Silver Spring, MD 20910 | 202-265-7337 | info@peer.org

I. OVERVIEW

In January and February of 2021, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) conducted a series of in-depth phone interviews with current and former Bureau of Land Management (BLM) employees from nine states from Headquarters, State Offices and Field Offices. The purpose of this survey was to identify steps the Biden administration can take to **strengthen the institutional capacity** of the BLM to better address conservation and climate change goals.

Right now, BLM is facing a dramatic pendulum swing as it transitions from the aggressive extractive resource agenda of the Trump administration to the ambitious climate and conservation agenda of the Biden administration. To achieve these current goals, the new administration and Congress will need to address important **governance issues** within the BLM. According to survey results, these issues include:

- **Staff shortages, turnover and movement**
- **Political influence and corruption**
- **Disparate enforcement of the law**
- **Lack of transparency and the dwindling use of science**
- **Retaliation and employee intimidation**
- **Inching extremism**

Of the employees surveyed, three quarters do not believe that the condition of the land and resources is improving. More than the three quarters do not believe that BLM:

- **Has the staffing or resources to accomplish its mission**
- **Meaningfully integrates climate change into resource planning, prioritizes resource protection**
- **Relies upon best available science in decision making**
- **Is headed in the right direction**

Current and former BLM staff made a **number of recommendations** about how to remedy these governance issues and actions that should be taken to fulfill the current administration's mandate with regard to climate change and conservation issues. These ideas have been grouped under broad headings, with the specific employee recommendations referenced in the report. The recommendations are:

- **Rebuild Employee Trust and Morale**
- **Improve Staffing**
- **Embrace Stakeholder Partnerships**

- **Science Based Decision Making**
- **Build Better Management**
- **Engage the Public**

Conclusion

As the Biden administration mandates and implements a conservation and climate agenda with the nation's lands playing a crucial role, it is clear that BLM is not meaningfully equipped to carry out that agenda. However, solutions exist for the new administration to solve the agency's underlying issues.

Methodology Note

Although our survey represents a small sample size, it is critical to listen to the voices and experiences of those who have worked at BLM. These shared experiences and input from civil servants will help make BLM a more effective and responsive agency.

PEER has conducted anonymous mailed surveys in the past, but with many employees currently working from home due to the pandemic, this survey was via phone. Each employee was emailed a survey (See Appendix A) and then through an in-depth interview, the employee would fill in the answer with background information, anecdotes and their recommendations for the agency. Interviews of current and former BLM staff were conducted by Rocky Mountain PEER Director Chandra Rosenthal. (See Appendix B for the survey responses.)



II. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) has used employee surveys as a critical tool for understanding the conditions inside public agencies, assessing agency direction and trends and gauging staff morale. PEER last conducted a survey of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff in 2017, in the aftermath of the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge headquarters by violent right-wing militias, and as President Donald Trump took office. PEER conducted the survey summarized in this report throughout the end of 2020 and the first weeks of 2021 with the advent of Joe Biden's presidency.

One of the agencies under the Department of the Interior, the BLM manages 248 million acres (10.5% of all land in the country, and the most of any agency), with most of those acres concentrated in the Western States. Its mission is to "sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations." It manages the country's onshore oil and gas program, has a hand in managing 25 national monuments and 34 million acres of National Conservation Lands, and manages more wildlife habitat than any other government entity.

Right now, BLM is facing a dramatic pendulum swing as it transitions from the aggressive extractive resource agenda of the last administration to the unprecedented climate agenda of this administration. The Biden administration, in its first week of office, set the tone by issuing an [Executive Order](#) to tackle the Climate Crisis. This is even more of a drastic turn than the agency faced when Trump took the reins, which one employee described as "whiplash from a conservation-heavy Obama administration to an industry-run administration which is developing the daylights out of everything."

Our survey results emphasize that BLM is currently at a point of reckoning. According to a [Trump administration 2018 report](#), fossil fuel production on public lands and waters currently is responsible for nearly a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.; the majority occur on BLM land. Addressing the governance issues within BLM in order implement the Biden administration climate agenda will require structural change.

III. GOVERNANCE ISSUES

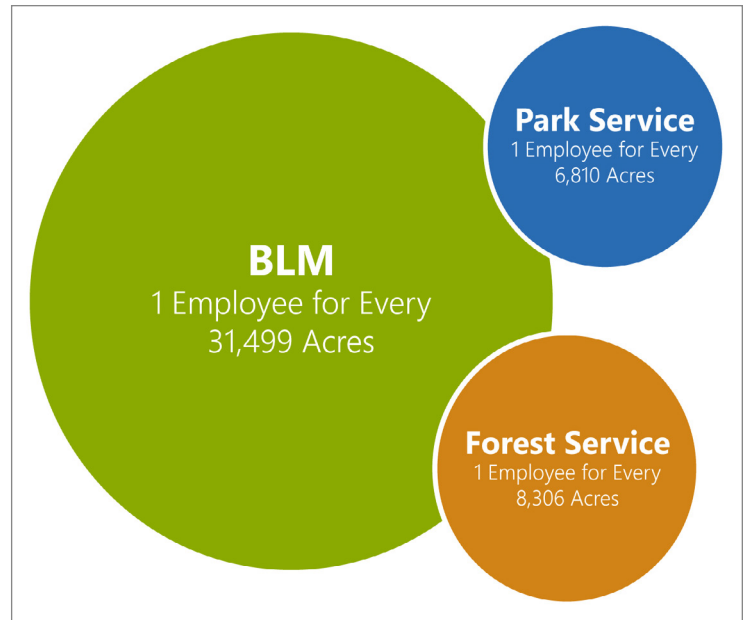
Staff Shortages, Turnover and Movement

In 2019, the Trump administration moved BLM headquarters from Washington, D.C., and decentralized agency management to Grand Junction, Colorado; Reno, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah and other offices

throughout the country. As a result, reported E&E News, the agency lost 87% of the employees reassigned in the move. Only 41 of 328 employees moved west, and the rest either “retired or found new employment.” The numbers flew in the face of the claims of William Perry Pendley, then-BLM Acting Director, that 66% of employees would make the move. “The loss of these mostly senior-level staffers has weakened the bureau, observers say, creating a ‘brain drain’ of institutional knowledge,” reported E&E.

Now, PEER understands that the majority of the 30 people in the Reno headquarters office are new hires from outside BLM. Such outside hires, in lieu of promoting from within, are now common in the agency. One employee who requested anonymity stated that people with military backgrounds and no natural resource background are being hired and integrated into the chain of command. Especially in the more remote field offices, there is a trend to hire local young people with associate degrees in range management, but absent greater expertise, these hires often cling to local status quos with no basis in current science.

This lack of expertise in new hires has resulted in a shunning of science at the agency, and even a demonization of intellectual culture in some cases. One employee reported that as “the PhD in the office,” they’ve been marginalized, not allowed on projects, and held up as an example to everyone else



“There has always been a pendulum swing with each administration. But during the Trump administration, there has been a dismantling.”

– Craig “Sage” Sorenson, retired Utah employee.

“BLM never has and never will have enough staff. It is absolute triage on the ground.”

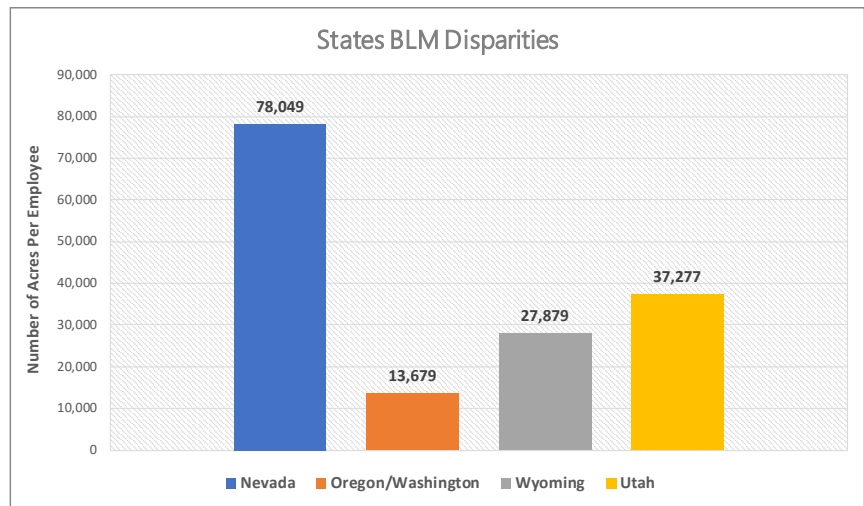
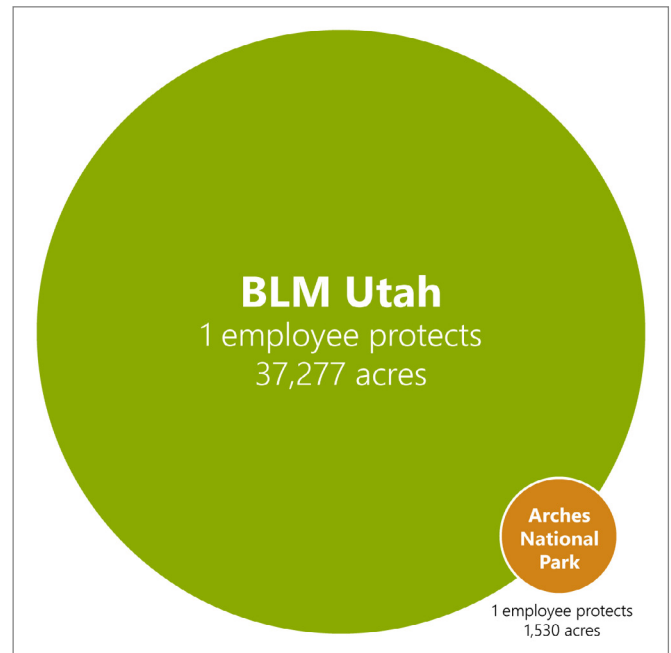
– Nevada employee

“We have effectively less employees doing work than ever before under the greatest challenges.”

– Anonymous employee..

of “what not to do.” In cultivating a culture of anti-intellectualism, one employee said, “The agency leadership down to the field office level is cynical about science. There is an internal culture that dismisses the collection of evidence in favor of enriching itself.”

Staff shortages also abound at BLM offices. “There is a revolving door of field managers and vacancies and details in every office,” said one employee, resulting in “everyone in BLM wears five hats,” said another, and there’s still “not enough people in the field checking on the resources.” It also acquits staff of any blame. An Arizona employee told us, “The musical chairs of rotating positions and leaving positions unfilled absolves everything of responsibility. ‘I’m an acting, I’m a detail. I can’t make a decision.’” Moab, Utah, one of the recreation centers of the country experiences high use of the resources for recreation and tourism, yet only has one law enforcement officer. Although tourism has skyrocketed, Utah’s Monticello office hasn’t increased law enforcement from the two positions that were created in 1985. Utah has on average one BLM employee working on 37,277 acres of public land. Contrast this to Arches National Park, which is located just five miles from the Moab Field Office and enjoys one employee for every 1,530 acres.



In Nevada, one employee estimates that there is one wildlife biologist for every three million acres, and three range specialists for every three million acres. “How can they possibly monitor an area this large, much less know what is going on? It is impossible to collect enough data to make decisions on conservation.” He says that the budget is based on allotment numbers rather than acreage—and in the desert, the allotments are huge. In contrast, some allotments such as inholdings encapsulated by private

allotments, can be as small as 600 acres—but they are the budget equivalent to a 600,000-acre allotment.

As a result of glaring staff shortages, volunteers are utilized for inappropriate positions. One current law enforcement officer relies on volunteers for law enforcement support because the position is so understaffed. In Utah, with the closure of the transfer station, locals now dump trash on BLM lands. At least twelve centralized dumps have been identified. In the absence of staff on the ground, field offices are using volunteers to clean up trash that could be toxic, cause injury or other harm. In Nevada, volunteer Boy Scouts were utilized to clean up a shooting range.

But volunteers can also act as watchdogs on agency work. Retired archeologist Mark Henderson reports that his office had gathered a group of 30 volunteers to regularly help with site work, driven by a gap in archeology staff. However, BLM management found the team threatening because the volunteers began to see permittee violations—cattle near archeological sites, prospective water development and well sites near archeological sites that had not been surveyed by archaeologists—and logged complaints about the fire program.

Political Corruption

Employees report that, rather than environmental analyses or procedure, field office managers' "pet" priorities often are the lens through which they make all decisions. "They have a fiefdom and their pet priority becomes the priority on everything. If it's hunting, then that takes priority, if it's grazing, that wins out—and always over conservation," said one employee. Others report that, regardless of managers' personal preferences, oil and gas has always been the priority; that in the DC office, "they [oil and gas employees] are the most important staffers because the perception is that they add money to the treasury." In the last four years of the Trump administration, all offices have prioritized oil and gas development.

"BLM is the most politically driven organization."

– Carolyn Shelton, retired after 27 years in four states. Shelton has worked for and with US Fish and Wildlife Service, NPS and USFS.

"This is a captured agency under the thumb of Republicans. Politicians and ranchers are running the show."

– Current Utah/former Washington employee.

One Utah employee noted that while BLM has traditionally been run at the field level, which helps to

de-politicize the agency, management has gradually become more subject to state directors and now primarily to headquarters—to the point, some say, where all decisions are run through headquarters, “all the way down to grazing in the field. And a lot of that is done on the phone because they don’t want to have a paper record of the decision-making process.” For instance, observes one employee, a state director cannot post a notice in the Federal Register without headquarters’ approval, which has resulted in public meetings and Regional Advisory Council meetings being cancelled. This further excludes the public from any transparency into decision-making. Oil and gas lease nominations are now approved at headquarters rather than the state level.

And even those decisions that used to be made at the state level were all moved even further up the chain, to the Interior level or even to White House level, creating a dearth of communication and a bottleneck of decision-making. One employee reports needing to conduct a mineral appraisal for a very routine, small lease modification. The appraisal had an expiration date, prompting the state office to send repeat reminders to headquarters with no response. Finally, the day before the appraisal would time out, this employee made the decision without headquarters approval, which violated the new process. “The Department of Interior and White House didn’t have enough capacity or knowledge to know how to make these decisions.”

Disparate Enforcement of the Law

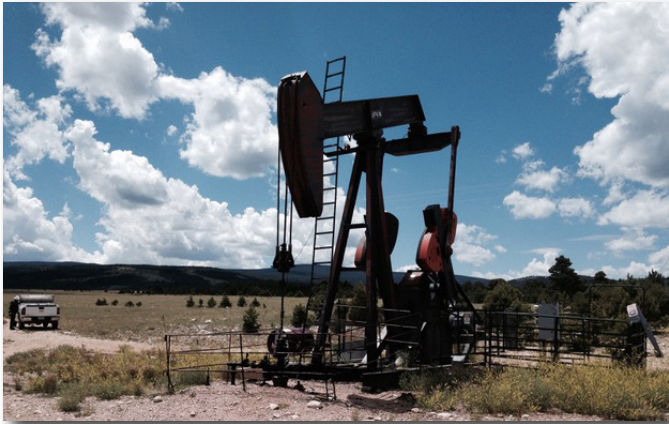
Such political corruption leads to extremely disparate enforcement of the law for special interests. Consider the example of the Bundy situation from the point of view of one employee, who told us the story of the two years that she and her Nevada office spent trying to impound and auction the Bundy cattle. At the very last minute, she received a call from headquarters and was told to stand down, without explanation. She believes that this order actually came from Department of the Interior or the White House. Thus, the political corruption that leads to disparate law enforcement is no longer a BLM issue; it needs to be addressed at these higher levels. “The dealing with the Bundys exemplifies BLM’s complicity with interests converting public resources to personal use.”

In Utah, an employee reported that the State Director came to one field office to check in on an oil and gas project that was moving slowly. He reportedly told the staff: “We aren’t here to protect resources. We are here to lease hydrocarbons.”

Such a narrative is pervasive, among both the agency and many locals. Ranchers are known as “customers” and oil and gas companies as the “clients.” Although visitors to monuments might drive a local economy, many locals remain adamant that grazing and oil and gas truly drive it. With such sway, these extractive stakeholders have the loudest voice in the room in nearly all decisions.

For example, with ranchers, one employee noted that the current excuse to cut pinyon juniper and

Does “Multiple-Use” Mean Minimal Oversight?



PHOTOS CREDIT: BLM.GOV

sagebrush to prevent wildfire, which have been the native species for thousands of years, has no scientific reasoning. Instead, it's to benefit cattle. Or consider the San Pedro Riparian Natural Resource Conservation Area in Arizona, where one ranching family has grazed trespass cattle since 1988 with “no fines, no impounding. No one will do anything about it. They basically own it,” said a retired employee.

In that respect, employees have been told not to use the term “trespass” and instead to use “unauthorized grazing” due to the politics of the word “trespass” and the response it elicits from ranchers. “You have to walk a fine line and constantly please them,” said one employee. Ranchers hold such control that BLM managers avoid upsetting any status quo for fear of upsetting them, as some are known to “yell, bully and intimidate to get what they want.”

Such placating is made worse by what one employee calls the “balkanization among jobs” in the agency, i.e., employees focus only what is happening on their assigned allotments—with no crossover. If a range specialist sees cows on a proposed oil and gas lease, for instance, that employee is no longer supposed to report it—and neither can the lessee report it.

In other political moves, one employee reports that a border office has seen its budget grow in the last four years to hire more law enforcement officers (LEO): the office now has eight or nine, up from two. But while destruction and looting of archeological sites has also increased, these LEOs are pulled off any investigations to patrol the border instead. “It has become a dangerous area and I no longer feel safe in the field in the southern part of the district because of all of the different agencies working on the border,” reports this employee.

Apart from oil, gas and mining interests, employees report that BLM has been ignoring many other groups that have an interest in public lands. Conservation groups are often viewed as “the enemy” rather than as partners. BLM does not leverage opportunities to collaborate with state Game and Fish and Wildlife agencies; it only reaches out to local agencies when there is a legal consultation requirement. Engaging with tribal nations is cursory and the agency rarely dedicates staff to working with independent nations.

Lack of Transparency and Dwindling Use of Science

The agency’s transparency mechanisms have suffered greatly in the face of political corruption, anti-intellectualism, staff turnover and fear of retaliation—and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has been one of the main victims.

The Trump administration’s new BLM NEPA regulations, according to employees, have gutted the law. Multiple employees cited this as one of the most debilitating changes to resource protection. One employee stated that “the new NEPA is disheartening.” The crunched timelines and changes in definitions can lead to the exclusion of science in planning. Instead of science and legislated procedures followed by specialists driving the process, “now

managers make their minds up before specialists are brought into the discussion,” wrote one employee in response to our survey. “Without some check on the decision maker, there is no way to check corruption or mis-management internally. Specialists

now only perform box checking and are censured by removing text and information after signing off on a document.” This was cited in a broad range of projects, from vegetation projects to large-scale projects like transmission lines and politicized projects like mining. “They don’t want to wait for the contracts to get the archaeologists to assess the large projects. Mining always comes first,” said one employee.

“This disconnect of not utilizing specialists to develop solid multiple use designs with proper mitigation and minimization has led to dissatisfaction with their jobs and very low morale.”

Others report that the Climate Change section of the Environmental Analysis portion of NEPA is usually “blown off”; it’s often “boiler-plate language vetted by an attorney in the state office, if anything is ever

included in a document.” There’s generally “eye rolling” if climate change is proposed for analysis, accompanied by a response that it’s outside the scope of NEPA. “There’s a lack of knowledge on how to deal with it,” said one employee, along with a “failure to keep up with the latest research and a lack of questioning.” As a result, that section has been removed entirely in many cases, report some employees, and “climate change-caused drought and fire aren’t considered in grazing and management programs; the agency can’t keep up with managing trespass and fire.”

“This disconnect of not utilizing specialists to develop solid multiple use designs with proper mitigation and minimization has led to dissatisfaction with their jobs and very low morale.”

The changes to NEPA have also impacted collaboration with stakeholders. For example, Section 106 consultations under the Archeological Resource Protection Act—which requires consultation with every agency with a stake in a resource that might be impacted, including tribes—are more limited and less meaningful; there might be a list of agencies but no comments inserted, for example. Environmental justice advocates contend that the Trump administration’s revisions to NEPA limit the ability of minority communities to participate in the permitting process.

In addition to the above examples, the agency has lessened its transparency to the public, requiring the public to file Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to obtain simple information. One employee reports that in his office: “A member of the public called to ask if there are bighorn sheep in the area. They were told to file a FOIA. And then the staff complains about the number of FOIAs,” even while refusing to fill them. Bloomberg Law has also reported that BLM was withholding public comments unless obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The lack of transparency extends to internal agency communication as well. Employees joked that there was so little communication from headquarters and state offices during the survey period that they “had to find out what was going on through reading E&E News.” The lack of transparency also extends to hiding information from the public on who even works in the agency: “BLM used the Bundy experience to remove the employee names and contacts from the website. Today BLM doesn’t even update the website to tell you who the field managers are.”

Retaliation, Bullying and Employee Intimidation

As transparency and procedures have fallen by the wayside and the agency has become more politicized, employees report retaliation, bullying and intimidation for using science and environmental procedures to inform projects and decisions. Many employees in the science disciplines detail being taken off of projects if their findings do not match project goals. They cite that they are subsequently not being invited to meetings

or coming back from vacation to see the office had issued pertinent documents in their absence.

“Biologists get all the heat in the office because they are reviewing proposals that management has already decided on—so all biologist feedback is considered negative. They can shop biologists, use one in another office to sign off on the proposal,” said one employee. Retaliation is about “quieting the noise,” explained another.

In other cases, science that does not agree with a project on the ground is often silenced. One scientist reports that NEPA documents outlining impacts to fish from a project—endangered fish disappearing from local waters, with two species no longer present—has been told to change her findings to “no effect.”

The web of retaliation stretches to all sides. Management worries about conservation groups publicizing their failings. “‘Risk management’ is a term you hear more and more. It means doing as little to make waves until you are sued by the environmentalists,” said one employee. “The field office managers avoid the public and just want to lay low and hide out. That is easier if they keep people out of the field—then there will be no document of resource abuse.”

It stretches to local communities: if employees are local and their identities are tied up in local grazing projects for example, they are likely to turn their backs on illegal or harmful activities because speaking up would be a betrayal to their families. Or employees are “are under severe pressure to let the ranchers do whatever they have been doing. In the small communities, their kids will be bullied, they will be ignored in the grocery store, if they don’t. It’s a cowboy culture of social control,” said one employee.

Additionally, there is no one to back up employees for speaking out. “There’s no ability to ‘blame up,’” said one employee. “Our supervisors don’t have our backs.”

“They don’t let me do my job. It is a struggle. I love my home and community and don’t want to leave.” – Anonymous employee.

Discrimination and Inching Extremism

Employees also report low morale because of discrimination. Last fall, Trump directed federal agencies to halt “divisive” diversity training. “When the agency did away with the diversity training, we felt an increase in discrimination of age and gender,” said one employee. Biden has since rescinded that order.

In 2018, Trump pardoned ranchers Dwight Hammond Jr and Steven Hammond. Their conviction for committing arson on federal lands in Oregon spurred Ammon Bundy to lead an armed standoff in 2016 on Malheur National Wildlife Refuge to protest their “unjust sentence.” The pardon, many employees feel, has worsened, and legitimized what many employees call the “Bundy problem.” Along with the

Department of Interior and White House, BLM has been slow, and some say failed entirely, in its duty to discipline or reign in anti-government extremists. Some employees believe that as a result, lawlessness has increased over the years and that the lack of action by the agency inspires local ranchers to similarly graze land and trespass cattle without permits or fees.

“BLM is clearly and chronically underfunded and understaffed. But adding more funds and staff to a fundamentally corrupt agency won't help solve the climate and extinction crises unless aggressive and effective cultural and structural reforms are successfully implemented.”

– Anonymous Employee

“The Bundy problem is symbolic of the disregard for the rule of law,” said one employee.

“EPA is fully transparent, I can see the names, contact information, organizational charts” said another, noting that the BLM website has become leaner over the years. “If it is really dangerous to work at BLM, shouldn’t the Department of Interior take care of the Bundy problem?”

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal oil and gas leasing program is fundamentally broken and must be overhauled to address the climate crisis, generate a fair return for taxpayers, respect local landowners, and support communities in the inevitable transition away from fossil fuel.

The following represents a summary of recommendations directly from BLM staff to set about remedying current governance issues and fulfill the current administration’s mandate with regard to climate change and conservation.

Better Management and Staffing

- Hire a new director from within BLM. The agency needs strong leadership that publicly commits to the administration’s conservation and climate change agenda, a return to the conservation and multiple-use elements of the agency’s mission and embrace of science and equal enforcement of law.
- The new director could do a listening tour to each state and field office to hear from the employees and the public. This would be an opportunity for the director to present the new agenda.
- Almost every employee brought up the issue of the headquarters move to Grand Junction as

symbolic of an agency in crisis. A majority of the employees recommended moving headquarters back to Washington, DC.

- Consider replacing all the current state directors and ensure 50% are women.
- Add a regional director into the three-tiered decision-making system (director, state director, district manager) who directs conservation lands like the National Conservation Lands System, National Conservation Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers and designated Wilderness.
- Hire a climate director in each state office to lead regional and field offices in a new approach.
- Hire 5,000 people, including GS 5–7. Rangers are needed to manage recreation and interact with public; entry level workers for positions like trail crews and sanitation; and 50% more field staff as well as resource management specialists and law enforcement officers.
- Re-establish the Job Corps to recruit youth and build a conservation ethic.

Increase Funding

- Increase funding for staffing and employee training.
- Reconsider the way funding is appropriated to the state offices. Evaluate funding on employee/acreage ratio by state to ensure that all of the resources are managed evenly.

Return to Conservation Mission

- A conservation mandate should come from the top down; it needs to be stated explicitly as part of the mission at each field office.
- Each employee should understand that conservation and protecting biodiversity is part of the multiple use mandate.
- Congress should amend the Federal Land Policy Management Act to clarify the agency's "multiple use mandate." Conservation should be legislated as a priority to protect the agency from political pendulum swings.

Restore the Role of Science

- Rethink NEPA to ensure that science is driving the decisions.
- Reconvene the BLM State Science Committees to help in disseminating new science and ensuring integrity in science.
- Independently audit managers' performances; those managers who ignore the law and fail to use the best science or release misleading or false information should be disciplined.

Re-Evaluate Grazing Program

- Set a fair market grazing fee.
- Re-evaluate the hot desert grazing program with a USGS study or new GAO report.
- Weigh the irreversible damage that is possible to sacred sites and archeological ruins when allowing grazing in these areas.
- Reconsider grazing in Wilderness.

Engage the Public

- Re-establish the citizen Resource Advisory Councils (RAC) and provide a path for RAC members to solicit direct public input into the public lands agenda.
- Involve volunteers on appropriate projects to introduce young people to the option of federal service and raise awareness of how public lands are managed.
- Allow public transparency into the agency budget at the field office level.

Stop Discrimination and Inching Extremism

- Re-instate diversity training.
- Investigate the ongoing Equal Employment Opportunity discrimination complaints in the context of the actual demographics of staff and management in the BLM, particularly in federal wildfire management.
- Publicly respond to the Hammond pardons.
- Consider civil prosecution of Ammon Bundy to recover the millions on grazing and revoke their leases.

Strengthen Partner Relationships

- Regard local tribes, conservation groups, recreation groups and other agencies as allies rather than enemies and engage with them regularly.
- At the same time, refrain from seeking total consensus from partners that might slow progress.
- Consider inter-agency offices like the one in Escalante, where Park Service, Forest Service and BLM can support one another and share resources.
- Build positive law enforcement relationships with county sheriffs, state police, and Customs and Border Patrol.

Roll Back Politicization and Nepotism

- Institute conflict-of-interest provisions in which employees and their families are preventing from holding grazing allotments or mineral leases or land inholdings.
- Institute conflict-of-interest provisions in which employees and their families are preventing from holding grazing allotments or mineral leases or land inholdings.

V. Webinar

On February 25, 2021 PEER hosted a webinar to distribute the survey results to the public. 216 people registered for the webinar entitled, “A New Era for the Bureau of Land Management? A conversation about institutional change and embracing conservation.” PEER hoped to bring together stakeholders to identify concrete steps that the Biden administration can take to strengthen the institutional capacity of BLM and address the new Administration’s goals of tackling the climate crisis and conservation.

This conversation was moderated by Rebecca Leber. She is a journalist in Washington, D.C., and has covered environmental and policy issues for many news outlets. She was honored with the SEAL Environmental Journalism Award, which celebrated her work documenting climate change impacts and solutions. She is currently housed at Mother Jones.

Panelists Included

1. **Chandra Rosenthal, Rocky Mountain Office Director for PEER.** She works with public employees and whistleblowers focused on public lands and climate issues. She previously served on a BLM Regional Advisory Council for Northwest Colorado.

Chandra discussed the survey results and the embedded issues of governance in the agency. She identified ways BLM could implement the new administration’s conservation and climate agenda.

2. **Laurel Williams, Officer for U.S. Public Lands and Rivers Conservation at the Pew Charitable Trusts.** She is an environmental policy specialist focused on resource management planning and policy. The Pew Trusts applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public, and invigorate civic life.

Pew has been examining trends in BLM resource management plans and Laurel discussed opportunities for conservation in the new administration.

3. **Richard Spotts, was the BLM Arizona Strip District Office's Planning and Environmental Coordinator from 2002 to 2017.** Before that he had several other professional jobs including working as an environmental attorney, registered lobbyist, watershed project director, and county zoning administrator.

Richard discussed problems with BLM's dominant management culture and provide some recommendations to solve them.

4. **Mary Jo Rugwell is a former BLM State Director for Wyoming.** She has also worked for BLM in Nevada and New Mexico and has worked in both the Obama and Trump Administrations.

Based on her 35 years of experience with the BLM, Mary Jo has considered how the agency can move forward with balance

The webinar was recorded and is available on the PEER YouTube channel.

Dave Gardner, from Studio 809, edited the discussion for the PEAK ENVIRONMENT PODCAST. Much of BLM lands were historical populated by indigenous people. We want to recognize and respect traditional stewards and we want to recognize the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous People and their traditional territories.

Slides from the webinar follow in Appendix C.

Appendix A



BLM SURVEY 2021

PEER is surveying key BLM employees and retirees about the agency's direction and needs. This survey is designed to elicit ideas on how to strengthen the institutional capacity of BLM to implement the conservation and climate change goals of the new administration.

As with all communications with PEER, your survey responses will be strictly confidential.

Current employee or retired

Position

Position at other agencies or with BLM stakeholder groups

Location(s)

Years at the agency

Mission: The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for stewardship of our public lands. The BLM is committed to manage, protect, and improve these lands in a manner to serve the needs of the American people. Management is based upon the principles of multiple use and sustained yield of our Nation's resources within the framework of environmental responsibility and scientific technology. These resources include recreation, rangelands, timber, minerals, watershed, fish and wildlife habitat, wilderness, air, and scenic quality, as well as scientific and cultural values.

General

1. BLM is headed in the right direction.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

2. Employee morale is strong.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Questions on Mission

3. BLM's mission is sufficient to address the country's current conservation and climate change challenges.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

4. BLM management meaningfully integrates climate change into resource planning.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree
5. BLM management meaningfully integrates conservation values into resource planning.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree
6. The condition of BLM lands and resources is improving.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree
7. BLM prioritizes resource protection.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree
8. BLM relies upon best available science in its decision-making.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree
9. Energy development has come to dominate BLM priorities.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Questions on Morale

10. Employee morale in my section is good.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree
11. BLM fosters a respectful workplace.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree
12. I fear job retaliation for reporting concerns to BLM management.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Questions on Staffing and Resources

13. BLM has the staffing and resources to accomplish its mission.
strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Questions on Improving BLM

14. The new administration can best improve BLM by:
-

15. BLM can take steps to strengthen its institutional capacity to implement the conservation and climate change goals of the new administration.

strongly agree agree no opinion disagree strongly disagree

Please explain:

What is your response to the following facts:

The most recent OPM employment numbers show that BLM staffing levels are flat and have been flat the last five years at around 10,000 FTE.

When you compare the agency to other land management agencies, the employee per acre of land works out to be:

BLM: 1 employee for every 24,500 acres of land

NPS: 1 employee for every 3,898 acres

FS: 1 employee for every 6,045 acres

Appendix B

2020-2021 PEER BLM Employee Survey

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Result
1. BLM is headed in the right direction.		2		3	17	5/6 Disagree
2. Employee morale is strong.		2	4	4	12	
3. BLM's mission is sufficient to address the countries current conservation and climate change challenges.	2	3	4	4	12	
4. BLM management meaningfully integrates climate change into resource planning.			2	8	13	5/6 Disagree
5. BLM management meaningfully integrates conservation values into resource planning.	2	2	1	7	10	
6. The condition of BLM land and resources is improving.		2	2	4	15	3/4 Disagree
7. BLM prioritizes resource protection.		2	1	8	12	5/6 Disagree
8. BLM relies upon best available science in its decision making.		2		11	10	5/6 Disagree
9. Energy development has come to dominate BLM priorities.	8	7	2	3	1	
10. Employee morale in my section is good.	1	4	5	4	9	
11. BLM fosters a respectful workplace.	1	5	5	8	4	
12. I fear job retaliation for reporting concerns to be a lead management.	8	6	6	2	1	
13. BLM has the staffing and resources to accomplish its mission.			2	5	16	5/6 Disagree
14. BLM can take steps to strengthen its institutional capacity to implement conservation and climate change goals of the new administration.	5	11	4	1	1	



You are invited to join us for a one-hour

LIVE WEBINAR

February 25, 2021

2:00 EST / 12:00 MST / 11:00 PST

A New Era for the Bureau of Land Management?

How to Embrace Institutional Change and Conservation Management

SPEAKERS

Chandra Rosenthal

Rocky Mountain Director, Public Employees
for Environmental Responsibility

Richard Spotts

Former BLM District Planning and Environmental
Coordinator and Environmental Attorney

Mary Jo Rugwell

Former BLM State Director for Wyoming

Laurel Williams

Officer for US Public Lands and Rivers
Conservation, Pew Charitable Trusts

MODERATOR

Rebecca Leber, Journalist – *Mother Jones*

Register for login information at bit.ly/neweraforBLM.

Questions? E-mail us at webinar@peer.org.



A New Era for the Bureau of Land Management?

How to Embrace Institutional Change and Conservation Management



Agenda

1. Welcome (3 min.)
2. Moderator, Rebecca Leber (3 min.)
3. Panelist #1, Chandra Rosenthal, PEER Employee Survey Results (5 min.)
4. Panelist #2, Laurel Williams, BLM Trends in Planning (5 min.)
5. Moderator Questions (5 min.)
6. Panelist #3, Richard Spotts, Reform for Change and Progress (5 min.)
7. Panelist #4, MaryJo Rugwell, Recommendations from a Career Employee (5 min.)
8. Moderator Questions (5 min.)
9. Moderated Audience Q& A (15 min.)





PEER
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES
FOR ENVIRONMENTAL
RESPONSIBILITY





Rebecca Leber
Mother Jones Magazine

2020-2021 PEER BLM Employee Survey

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Result
1. BLM is headed in the right direction.		2		3	17	5/6 Disagree
2. Employee morale is strong.		2	4	4	12	
3. BLM's mission is sufficient to address the countries current conservation and climate change challenges.	2	3	4	4	12	
4. BLM management meaningfully integrates climate change into resource planning.			2	8	13	5/6 Disagree
5. BLM management meaningfully integrates conservation values into resource planning.	2	2	1	7	10	
6. The condition of BLM land and resources is improving.		2	2	4	15	3/4 Disagree
7. BLM prioritizes resource protection.		2	1	8	12	5/6 Disagree
8. BLM relies upon best available science in its decision-making.		2		11	10	5/6 Disagree
9. Energy development has come to dominate BLM priorities.	8	7	2	3	1	
10. Employee morale in my section is good.	1	4	5	4	9	
11. BLM fosters a respectful workplace.	1	5	5	8	4	
12. I fear job retaliation for reporting concerns to management.	8	6	6	2	1	
13. BLM has the staffing and resources to accomplish its mission.			2	5	16	5/6 Disagree
14. BLM can take steps to strengthen its institutional capacity to implement the conservation and climate goals of the new administration.	5	11	4	1	1	



New Goals: Climate and Biodiversity



Themes that Emerged from PEER Employee Surveys and Interviews

- Poor Morale
- Employee Staffing Issues
- Political Influence and Corruption
- Lack of Transparency
- Inching Extremism

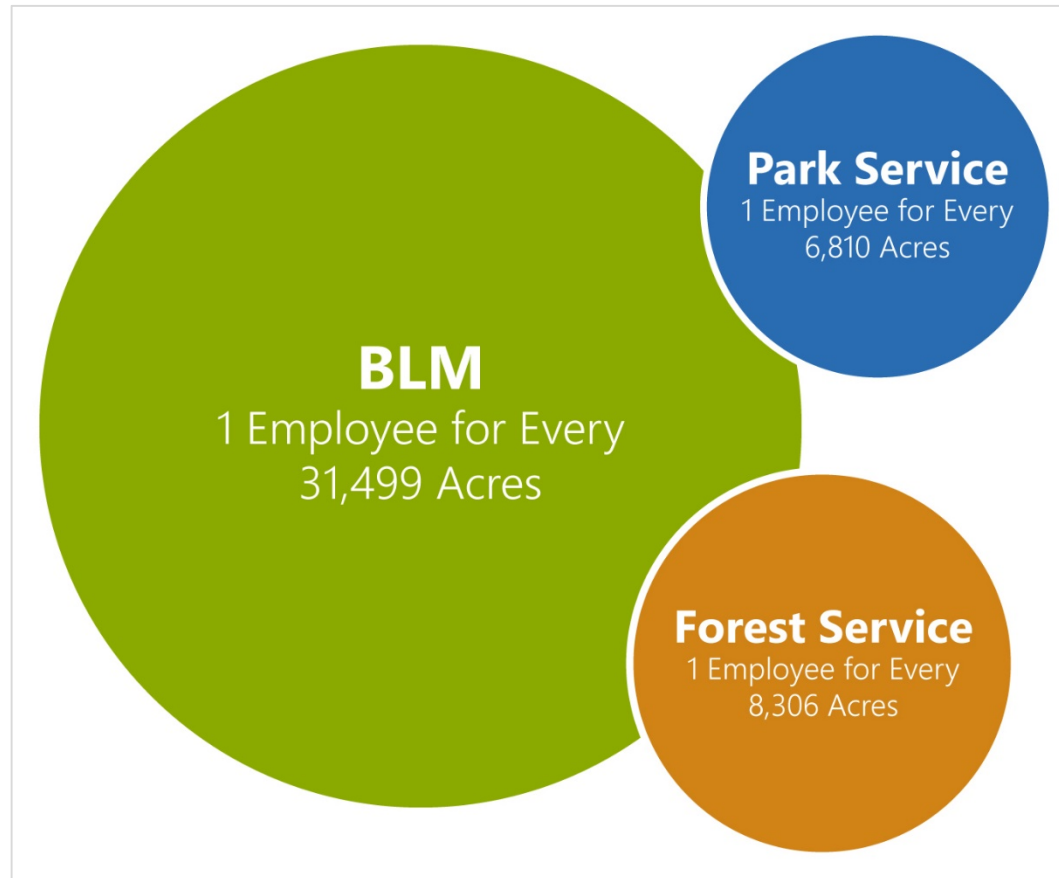


Survey Results

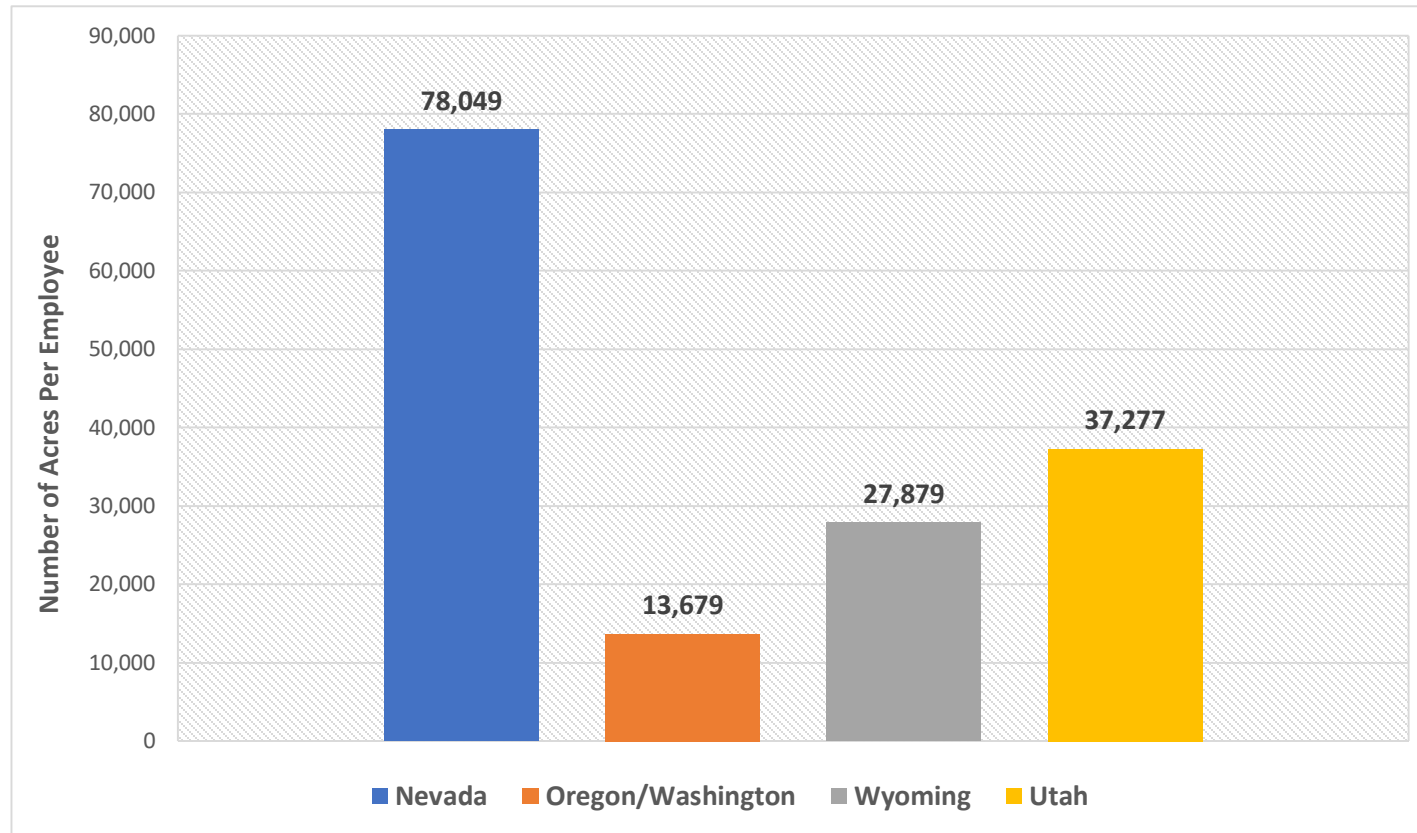
- More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of participants surveyed do not believe that BLM is heading in the right direction.
- $\frac{3}{4}$ of participants surveyed do not believe that the condition of the land and resources is improving.
- More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the participants surveyed do not believe that BLM has the staffing or resources to accomplish its mission.
- More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the participants do not think that BLM meaningfully integrates climate change into resource planning, prioritizes research protection, or relies upon best available science in decision-making.



Uneven Staffing of Federal Lands



BLM Staff Level Differences in States

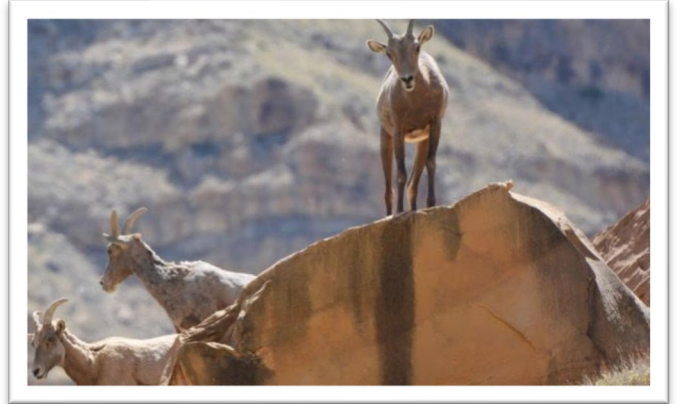


Does “Multiple-Use” Mean Minimal Oversight?

BLM Utah
1 employee protects
37,277 acres

**Arches
National
Park**

1 employee protects
1,530 acres



Repair Governance Issues

- Transparency
- Science Matters
- Political Influence and Corruption
- Extremism



Credit: Caught Between Conscience and Career

Recommendations

- Rebuild Employee Trust and Morale
- Improve Staffing
- Embrace Stakeholder Partnerships
- Science Based Decision Making
- Build Better Management
- Engage the Public



Reform the BLM: An Agency Insider Looks at a History of Failure and Sees Long Delayed Opportunities for Change and Progress



Dwarf bear claw poppy, Utah BLM

Six First Steps to Reform BLM

1. Immediately remove all appointed and embedded Trump appointees.
2. Do not "recycle" the previous Obama era BLM appointees who only focused on the high-profile "shiny objects" and failed to address BLM's basic biases and problems.
3. Modify performance evaluations to link job duties with positive on the ground resource outcomes, not bureaucratic "widgets." Land health should be the ultimate measure not how many often hollow administrative processes or tasks were performed.
4. There should be independent audits of manager's performance, and those managers who ignore the law, best science, or release misleading or false information should be terminated.
5. Require mandatory "continuing education" for managers and resource specialists to ensure that they remain up-to-date on the latest laws, regulations, and policies as well as the latest science relating to the lands and resources that they manage.
6. The Inspector General "whistleblower" process should be overhauled. Employees need to be able to count on their complaints being considered promptly, thoroughly, and confidentially, and fairly investigated. The findings and what came of them in terms of any remedial or enforcement actions should be publicly available. I know first-hand that this process is unreliable and broken.



Personal Introduction



Bobcat Draw Badlands WSA, BLM WY

Recommendations from a Career Bureau of Land Management Employee



Advice (Based on 35 Years of Experience)

1. Protect Apolitical Civil Service (Senior Executive Service)
2. Communicate With All Employees at All Levels
3. Trust but Verify/Hold Employees Accountable
4. Restore a Better National Office to D.C.
5. Honor Delegation of Authority
6. Amend the Federal Land Policy and Management Act
7. Nominate Knowledgeable Director Candidate



Contact Information

- Chandra Rosenthal, PEER, croenthal@peer.org
- Laurel Williams, the Pew Charitable Trusts, lwilliams3@pewtrusts.org
- Richard Spotts, former BLM employee, raspotts2@gmail.com
- Mary Jo Rugwell, former BLM employee, m_rugwell@yahoo.com
- Rebecca Leber, Mother Jones, rleber@motherjones.com

www.peer.org





BLM Ignores Own Findings in Proposed Management Plans

Millions of acres of Western public lands could lose protections

Overview

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees a quarter-billion acres of public lands across the nation. Every two decades, the agency revises its management plans for each of the more than 100 planning areas—designated regions that it oversees. In mid-2019, BLM released six draft plans that will guide management of more than 20 million acres for the next 20 to 30 years. The Pew Charitable Trusts reviewed the plans and found troubling trends within agency-preferred alternatives—the course BLM says it is most likely to take—that could result in the loss of protection for millions of acres of public land: The proposals would fail to conserve lands that the agency’s own research has deemed worthy of protection,¹ cut decades-old safeguards, minimally protect a fraction of 1 percent of the areas found to contain wilderness characteristics, and open vast swaths of public lands to energy and mineral development.

Federal law requires BLM to consider special management, including prioritizing the designation and protection of areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs), for lands that have special fish and wildlife, archaeological, and unique values. However, the 2019 drafts feature far fewer ACECs designations than the agency’s findings of lands that meet the criteria warrant and propose to eliminate ACECs that have been in place for decades.² (See Table 1.)

As with ACECs, a large gap exists between BLM’s findings for lands with wilderness characteristics (LWCs)—natural places that provide excellent opportunities for solitude or primitive, unconfined recreation—and how many of these lands are included for adequate management in the draft plans: Less than 1 percent of agency-identified LWCs would be managed to protect these values under the BLM drafts.

Table 1

BLM’s Draft and Final Resource Management Plans Mean Loss of Protection for Millions of Acres

Acreage and river miles threatened under preferred plans, by area

	Bering Sea Western Interior (Draft)	Lewistown (Draft)	Missoula (Draft)	Four Rivers (Draft)	Southeastern Oregon (Draft)	Eastern Colorado (Draft)	Uncompahgre (Proposed)	Total
Planning area acreage	13,400,000	750,300	150,000	783,160	4,600,000	668,000	675,000	21,026,460
ACECs in prior plan (acreage)	1,884,376	22,900	1,225	64,300	n/a	69,500	30,000	2,072,301
ACECs proposed to be removed by BLM from prior plan (acreage)	1,884,376	22,900	585	18,720	n/a	23,200	n/a	1,926,581
ACECs determined by BLM to meet relevance and importance criteria (acreage)	4,248,610	32,008	1,225	112,060	n/a	101,400	215,840	4,711,143
ACECs preferred alternative (acreage)	0	0	640	45,470	n/a	46,300	51,320	143,730
ACECs proposed final plan (acreage)	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	n/a	TBD	30,190	TBD
LWCs found by BLM to meet agency- established criteria (acreage)	13,382,250	202,681	2,523	8,000	1,206,780	190,753	42,150	15,035,137

Continued on next page

	Bering Sea Western Interior (Draft)	Lewistown (Draft)	Missoula (Draft)	Four Rivers (Draft)	Southeastern Oregon (Draft)	Eastern Colorado (Draft)	Uncompahgre (Proposed)	Total
LWCs preferred alternative (acreage)	0	0	2,525*	0	0	1,300*	18,320	22,145
LWCs proposed final plan (acreage)	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	18,320†	TBD
Ecological emphasis areas in preferred alternative (acreage)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	177,700	177,700
Ecological emphasis areas in proposed final plan (acreage)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	0
Backcountry conservation areas preferred alternative	0	0	0	0	n/a	0	n/a	0
Wild and scenic river eligibility (miles)	650	89	27.6	91	n/a	112	154	1123.6
Wild and scenic rivers suitable preferred alternative (miles)	0	0	2.1	n/a	n/a	60	104.6	166.7
Wild and scenic rivers suitable proposed final plan (miles)	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	104.6	104.6

* Plans for these areas prioritize multiple uses over protecting wilderness character.

† Lands managed to minimize impacts on wilderness character, while managing for other uses.

Sources: Bureau of Land Management, "Bering Sea-Western Interior Resource Management Plan: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern—Report on the Application of the Relevance and Importance Criteria and Special Management" (2018); Bureau of Land Management, "Lewistown Field Office, Resource Management Plan Revision and Environmental Impact Statement: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern—Report on the Application of the Relevance and Importance Criteria" (2015); Bureau of Land Management, "Preliminary Areas of Critical Environmental Concern Report, Missoula Resource Management Plan" (2018); Bureau of Land Management, "Four Rivers Field Office Areas of Critical Environmental

Concern (ACEC) Report,” Appendix U (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Evaluation of Potential ACECs: Relevance and Importance Criteria April 2019 Draft, Royal Gorge Field Office” (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Evaluation of Existing and Proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for the Uncompahgre Planning Area” (2013); Bureau of Land Management, “Bering Sea-Western Interior: Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement” (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Draft Lewistown Resource Management Plan” (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, Missoula Field Office” (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Draft Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan Amendment and Draft Environmental Impact Statement” (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Draft Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement” (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Uncompahgre Field Office Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement” (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Bering Sea-Western Interior Resource Management Plan: Wilderness Characteristics Inventory Report” (2015); Bureau of Land Management, “Lands With Wilderness Characteristics Report: Lewistown Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement” (2016); Bureau of Land Management, “Missoula Field Office Resource Management Plan Revision: Lands With Wilderness Characteristics” (2017); Bureau of Land Management, “Four Rivers Field Office Wilderness Characteristics Technical Report,” Appendix W (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Lands With Wilderness Characteristics Inventory Report, Royal Gorge Field Office” (2018); Bureau of Land Management, “Uncompahgre Planning Area Wilderness Characteristics Inventory: 2015 Update” (2015); Bureau of Land Management, “Bering Sea-Western Interior Resource Management Plan: Wild & Scenic River Eligibility Determination Report” (2015); Bureau of Land Management, “Bering Sea-Western Interior Resource Management Plan: Wild & Scenic River Study Report” (2018); Bureau of Land Management, “Final Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report, Lewistown Field Office, Montana” (2010); Bureau of Land Management, “Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Report, Lewistown Field Office, Montana: Chouteau, Judith Basin, Fergus, and Petroleum Counties” (2015); Bureau of Land Management, “Final Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report, Missoula Field Office, Montana” (2010); Bureau of Land Management, “Preliminary Wild and Scenic River Suitability Report, Missoula Resource Management Plan” (2018); Bureau of Land Management, “Four Rivers Field Office Wild and Scenic River Eligibility and Tentative Classification Report,” Appendix V (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Final Wild & Scenic River Eligibility Report for the Royal Gorge Field Office” (2015); Bureau of Land Management, “Wild & Scenic River Suitability Report—Royal Gorge Field Office” (2019); Bureau of Land Management, “Wild and Scenic River Suitability Report for the BLM Uncompahgre Planning Area” (2013)

©2019 The Pew Charitable Trusts

94%

Overall percentage of ACEC acreage from prior plan removed in agency-preferred alternative in pending plan

2.1%

Overall percentage of ACEC acreage meeting relevance and importance criteria that is included in preferred alternatives

.03%

Overall percentage of BLM-identified LWC acreage included in preferred alternatives

6.4%

Overall percentage of BLM-identified eligible wild and scenic rivers recommended for designation in preferred alternatives

Endnotes

- 1 Bureau of Land Management, "Bering Sea-Western Interior Resource Management Plan Areas of Critical Environmental Concern Report on the Application of the Relevance and Importance Criteria and Special Management" (2018), <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPagelId=48431>; Bureau of Land Management, "Lewistown Field Office, Resource Management Plan Revision and Environmental Impact Statement: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern—Report on the Application of the Relevance and Importance Criteria" (2015), <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPagelId=50899>; Bureau of Land Management, "Preliminary Areas of Critical Environmental Concern Report, Missoula Resource Management Plan" (2018), <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPagelId=77158>; Bureau of Land Management, "Four Rivers Field Office Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) Report," Appendix U (2019), <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPagelId=10301>; Bureau of Land Management, "Evaluation of Potential ACECs: Relevance and Importance Criteria: April 2019 Draft, Royal Gorge Field Office" (2019), <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPagelId=53991>; Bureau of Land Management, "Evaluation of Existing and Proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for the Uncompahgre Planning Area" (2013), <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage¤tPagelId=86004>.
- 2 Ibid.

For further information, please visit:
pewtrusts.org

Contact: Emily Diamond-Falk, communications officer
Email: ediamond-falk@pewtrusts.org
Project website: pewtrusts.org/BLM

The Pew Charitable Trusts is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today's most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public, and invigorate civic life.