

Questions and Answers

1) What is the action being announced today?

The Secretary is announcing her intent to consolidate the bureaus' real estate appraisal functions within a Departmental office as determined by an Action Team comprised of representatives from all affected offices within DOI, including appraisers and realty specialists. The Action Team will be appointed shortly, and actual organizational reform and realignment of the function will occur under a timetable to be developed by the Action Team. The goal is to create the new office and assign employees to it by September 30. The Department will maintain a dialogue with all affected individuals throughout this process.

2) Why is the appraisal function being consolidated?

The Secretary believes that DOI must fulfill its responsibility to uphold the public trust through unbiased and objective appraisals. A number of concerns have been raised over the years by the General Accounting Office, the Office of the Inspector General, the Appraisal Foundation, and most recently by an interagency team, regarding the ability of DOI to consistently meet this responsibility. In particular, the ability of appraisers to work independently and in accordance with professional standards has been cited as a recurring concern. The Secretary believes that consolidation of the appraisal function in a manner that assures its independence from other aspects of realty operations is the most appropriate action to achieve lasting reform.

The Secretary believes that this action will restore public confidence in the Department's land acquisition and exchange programs by assuring greater appraiser independence, efficiencies in workload and contract management, and consistent implementation of appraisal standards.

3) Will I lose my job as a result of consolidating the appraisal function?

No, we do not believe anyone will lose their job as a result of this action. Consolidation of the appraisal function is an action to address institutional problems which have plagued bureau appraisal programs in the past. It does not alter the Department's need for qualified appraisal staff, especially given the likelihood that many appraisers will retire within the next several years. There is, however, potential for modifications of position descriptions, duties, and responsibilities to be made for both appraisers and realty specialists.

4) Will I have to relocate?

While the appraisal function is being consolidated within a Departmental office as determined by the Action Team, most appraisal operations will continue to be conducted in the field. The Department does, however, intend to concentrate field operations in a smaller number of locations than is currently the case. This is necessary given the expected increase in retirements among appraisers, and the ongoing shift in staff appraisal work to appraisal reviews and contract monitoring. The Action Team will consider all options for structuring appraisal functions in the field; however, depending on the outcome of the Team's analysis, based on workload and the most efficient way to allocate resources, some appraisers may eventually have to relocate. Nevertheless, no decision has been made as to whether the relocation of any specific appraisers will be necessary.

If a decision is made to relocate some personnel, any actual relocation assignments would occur under a phased timeframe, meaning that relocation is not imminent. Most likely, as new or unfilled appraiser positions became available, they would be filled in the locations determined by the Action Team. We will strive to affect any changes with the least amount of disruption possible to individuals and offices. If relocations are necessary, the Department will work closely with individuals who are close to retirement, or have other compelling reasons not to relocate, to achieve satisfactory outcomes.

4) To whom will I report?

Specifics of the new reporting and supervising structure will be addressed by the Action Team. However, appraisers will be supervised and receive delegation of authority from other appraisers. Specifically, field and contract appraisers will report to Regional Chief Appraisers. The Regional Chief Appraisers will then, in turn, report to the Department's Chief Appraiser, who will be located in Washington, D.C. Realty operations will remain with the bureaus.

5) How will my job change?

An appraiser's job is not likely to change significantly, with the exception of new reporting relationships. Appraisers will enjoy the benefits of increased training, and the potential for a more structured career path and professional development. Appraisal review and contract monitoring will continue to comprise a prominent portion of the work. The specific workload structure and assignments for appraisers will, however, need to be determined by the Action Team and subsequently by supervisors.

As noted above, while appraisal functions are being consolidated, realty operations will remain with bureaus. Some current positions include both appraisal and realty work. The position descriptions, duties, and responsibilities of employees occupying such positions must be reconfigured and organizational assignments made consistent

with the new structure for administering appraisal and realty functions respectively. In so doing, the preferences of employees will be given significant consideration.

6) Are there any benefits of consolidation to appraisers?

Yes, we believe there will be many benefits to appraisers from consolidation. First, appraisers will report only to other appraisers, thus providing greater independence. Second, consolidation will allow for greater emphasis and consistency to be placed on meeting or exceeding nationally-recognized appraisal standards. Third, tailored educational standards for initial qualification, appraisal staff, and contractors will be created. Continuing education, emphasizing the unique challenges facing appraisers of Federal lands, will be promoted to attain these standards. Fourth, consolidation will allow for a more structured career path and enhance development opportunities.

7) Have the unions been informed of this action?

Yes, the Department has notified both national and local unions and will consult with them, as appropriate, prior to announcing specifics of the implementation plan.