



Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

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Mr. Earl E. Devaney
Inspector General
Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

May 8, 2003

Dear Mr. Devaney:

I am writing on behalf of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) to request that your office conduct an audit of funds used for a total office redecoration now taking place in the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Winnemucca field office. Specifically, PEER is asking the Department of Interior Office of Inspector General to determine —

1. The source of funds and the total amount of those funds used to purchase matching furniture sets for the entire 120-person staff;
2. Whether employees improperly billed program accounts, such as fire control and range management, for the time they actually spent boxing files, moving furniture and otherwise facilitating the office makeover; and
3. The extent to which funds and staff labor diverted to this redecoration impaired the functioning of, or contributed to the backlog of unfinished work in, other BLM programs within the Winnemucca field office.

As indicated by the attached employee emails, a large part of the Winnemucca office makeover involves installation of new matching "system furniture." Employees have been told to pack up their files, move out old furniture, and find a way to keep busy out of the office while the three-week refurnishing is completed. In the interim, all 120 employees in the Winnemucca field office have access to only two phone lines and a total of six computers terminals clustered in a conference room.

The BLM Winnemucca field office is responsible for federal lands encompassing 8.5 million acres in northwestern Nevada, an area larger than the state of Maryland. BLM holdings in this region include the Black Rock Desert Region and the Great Basin. That office maintains a wide range of responsibilities in areas such as fire control, range management, wildlife protection and realty services, among others.

BLM employees have contacted PEER raising the following concerns:

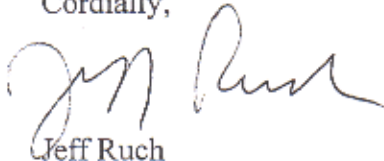
- **Cost.** Field Manager Terry Reed has, despite recent budget cuts, decided to install matching “systems furniture” suites for all employees. While employees do not know the exact amount that will be expended to, the word-of-mouth estimates put the total cost between \$350,000 and \$500,000;
- **Source of Funds.** Since there has been no specific allocation made for these purposes, employees believe that the funds are being diverted from range conservation and fire management, the two largest office program budgets. In addition, staff members have been instructed to charge their time packing and doing other redecoration to range, fire and other program accounts; and
- **Disruption.** As there is no office space for employees during the redecoration, workers are being urged to use vacation time. Those who choose to work are asked to spend as much time as possible in the field or to work out of their cars.

According to employees, this redecoration has diverted funds, disrupted operations and prevented people from doing their jobs in what is supposed to be a public agency. While PEER believes that BLM employees deserve appropriate, functional furniture, employees question the need for this seemingly sizeable investment to replace furniture that was currently functional.

PEER is requesting the audit in order to obtain definitive answers to the employee concerns and to reveal the extent to which funding and staff time have been diverted improperly from the official functions to which they were supposed to be devoted.

If you have questions or need any additional information in order to evaluate the merits of this request, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Cordially,



Jeff Ruch
Executive Director

Cc. Terry Reed, BLM Winnemucca Field Manager
Robert V. Abbey, BLM Nevada State Director