

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC 20515

November 14, 2019

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G St. NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

In July 2019, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt announced that the majority of the approximately 500 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) employees in Washington, D.C. would be transferred to a variety of locations in the west and that a new BLM headquarters would be established in Grand Junction, Colorado. While agency reorganizations are not uniformly problematic, I and many of my colleagues have expressed concerns in briefings, in letters^{1,2}, and at Natural Resources Committee hearings³ about the planning of and motivation for this ongoing move. We are concerned about how this reorganization might impact the long-term ability of BLM to carry out its obligations and responsibilities on more than 240 million acres of federal land and over 700 million acres of federal mineral estate.

The Department of the Interior has cited a number of benefits of this relocation, including enhanced management, oversight, and communication; improved customer service and stakeholder engagement; and potential for decreased property leasing costs and travel expenses. Some stakeholders, including former BLM employees, have questioned the value of moving these staff out of Washington, D.C., given that 90 percent of the BLM staff already work in the west. Others have expressed concerns that a BLM presence is needed in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area to interact with other federal agencies and to work with Congress on policy, budget, and legislative goals.

We are requesting that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) examine the process through which decisions related to this relocation took place. Specifically, we'd like the GAO to review

¹ Grijalva, R. (2019, July 23). Letter to the Honorable David Bernhardt, U.S. Secretary of the Interior. Retrieved from <https://naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/2019-07-23%20RG%20to%20DOI%20Relocation%20Plan.pdf>

² Grijalva, R. (2019, September 25). Letter to the Honorable David Bernhardt, U.S. Secretary of the Interior. Retrieved from <https://naturalresources.house.gov/download/chair-grijalva-to-sec-bernhardt-doc-request-on-blm-reorganization>

³ BLM Disorganization: Examining the Proposed Reorganization and Relocation of the Bureau of Land Management Headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado: *Hearing before the House Committee on Natural Resources*, House, 116th Cong. (2019). Retrieved from <https://naturalresources.house.gov/hearings/-blm-disorganization-examining-the-proposed-reorganization-and-relocation-of-the-bureau-of-land-management-headquarters-to-grand-junction-colorado>

(1) whether the goals the agency is trying to achieve with the relocation of staff can be met under the current plan; (2) the process used to develop the specifics of the proposed move, including analysis related to the benefits of relocation, costs of relocation (i.e., leasing of new facilities and physical relocation of staff), choice of location for the new headquarters and other sites for staff relocation, and staff positions to be relocated; (3) the extent to which current career staff and key stakeholders were involved in determining which positions would be relocated; (4) how the agency is planning to implement the move, including what financial and staff resources it is allocating to this effort, the source of the funds, and in what timeframes the move will occur; and (5) how the process and analyses compare to other successful executive agency reorganizations in the past.

Thank you for your timely attention to this request. If you have any additional questions, please contact please contact the National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee staff at 202-225-6065.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair

House Committee on Natural Resources