

**Committee on Natural Resources
Oversight Hearing
1324 Longworth House Office Building
March 27, 2019
10:00 am**

Hearing on “*Examining the Department of the Interior’s Spending Priorities and the President’s Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Proposal*”

Questions from Rep. Grijalva for Scott Cameron, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management, and Budget, U.S. Department of the Interior

1. Mr. Cameron, the *New York Times* published a concerning article about efforts at DOI to withhold Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) biological opinions examining the effects of three well-known neurotoxic pesticides: chlorpyrifos, malathion, and diazinon. The biological opinions were formally requested by EPA in 2016 after they concluded that these three pesticides could harm up to 97% of all threatened and endangered species under the Endangered Species Act.

In May 2017, at the Pesticide Program Dialogue Committee meeting, FWS stated that the draft biological opinions were nearly complete and would be ready for public comment and review that summer. They presented evidence to show that approximately 1,400 threatened and endangered species are being driven towards extinction by chlorpyrifos alone.

Shortly before that meeting, however, Dow Chemical and other pesticide manufacturers sent a letter to DOI asking them to stop this process and withdraw EPA’s assessment. Later, in October and November 2017, Acting Secretary David Bernhardt had several meetings about the biological opinions and helped to draft a letter saying DOI was no longer prepared to release them.

Subcommittee Chairman, Representative Velazquez, and I sent a document request to DOI asking to see the drafts of all three biological opinions. Will you ensure that

the Committee receives the most recent draft versions of the biological opinions on these three pesticides?

2. During the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations

Subcommittee hearing, you said that Interior's mission is "not as central to climate change as the mission of EPA might be." However, as a recent U.S. Geological Survey report found, fossil fuels produced on public lands account for nearly a quarter of our national emissions of CO₂. Broad scientific consensus has concluded that emission of CO₂ through manmade activities is a major contributor to climate change. And as we all know, the U.S. is one of the top two emitters of greenhouse gases across the globe.

Mr. Cameron, given these facts, do you believe that Interior has a major responsibility to decrease its contribution to climate change? How is climate change not central to the Department's mission?

3. DOI has recently made several changes to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) including proposing new regulations and putting a political appointee in charge of all FOIA requests. The documents supporting these changes suggest that they are being put in place because Interior is overwhelmed by the number and complexity of FOIA requests.

But your own annual report suggests other problems—problems that are entirely controllable by decision-makers at DOI. The report indicates a loss of staff because of DOI's hiring freeze and budgeting, FOIA officers not spending enough time on FOIA requests compared to their other duties, and an increase in litigation that is resulting from an ever-growing backlog of requests.

Is Interior proposing an increase in staff dedicated to processing FOIA requests? If so, how many? Has Interior lifted the hiring freeze that has been in place since the beginning of the trump administration as it applies to people working on FOIA

requests? This committee has made a documents request, which was cosigned by Chairman Cummings about some of these questions. Will Interior be providing a substantive production for that request?

4. Since former Secretary Zinke resigned in December 2018, the question remains as to whether the Department-wide reorganization of DOI will continue. Based on the \$28 million budget request for the reorganization, it appears the answer is that it will. The Committee has requested a copy of the master plan or cost benefit analysis for the reorganization, but we still have not received anything.

Is there is no master plan? Is there no cost benefit analysis? Is there no document that systematically and thoroughly demonstrates the need for a Department-wide reorganization and why the approach currently underway is the best approach?

5. The President's Executive Order on reorganization required a report to be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget by each Department, including DOI. Will you provide that document to this committee? If no, why not?
6. When Mr. Bernhardt communicates with you electronically, what applications does he use? Email? Text? Signal? Messenger or Chat apps?
7. There were significant impacts from the government shutdown to our National Parks. There are reports that NPS has conducted a damage assessment and/or report on the total costs and damages to things like visitor centers, buildings, restrooms, equipment, roads, forests, trails, signs, petroglyphs, and entry fees lost. When is DOI planning to release that document? Does DOI have a plan to pay for all the damage incurred to National Parks as a result of the decision to keep the parks open during the government shutdown?
8. The proposed budget for the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is concerning. In 2016, OIG received 955 complaints. In 2018, OIG received 1,209 complaints (27%

increase). The FY2020 budget request ask for flat funding as compared to FY2019 enacted funds. Given the considerably increased workload, what is the justification for not requesting increased funding for OIG?

9. Regarding the use of entrance fee revenue during the government shutdown, Daniel Smith, the Deputy Director of NPS, wrote, "After consultation with the Office of the Solicitor at the Department of the Interior, it has been determined that these funds (park entrance fees) can and should be used to provide immediate assistance and services to highly visited parks during the lapse in appropriations." If the decision to keep parks open with entrance fees cleared legal review from the Solicitor, why did Interior reverse the decision after Chairwoman McCollum and Chairman Grijalva asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate?
10. We have been inundated with calls from employees that work at DOI headquarters, who complain of a toxic work environment. They say morale is low and that the stress is making people ill and driving the most effective and efficient employees away from Interior. What will the Department do to change that?
11. DOI requested around \$28 million for the Department-wide reorganization. Your testimony says that about \$11 million of that is for "Relocation and Regional Stand up." Which bureaus are planned to be moved out of Washington, DC?
12. The Unified Regions, a component of the Department-wide reorganization, will play a role that has been very unclear. At one point, it was stated that there would be 3-5 staff at the office of each unified region. Is that still the case? What will be the responsibilities of the Inter Regional Director (IRD)? Can you provide the Committee a position description? How will IRDs share or supersede authority with the BLM state directors? How will IRDs be selected? Will they be selected by the Executive Resources Board? Will the IRDs be political appointees?

13. You talked about the reorganization being an effort to move the agencies closer to the people they serve. Are you aware that 90% of DOI employees are already placed outside the DC region? Are you aware that Fish and Wildlife, BLM and Bureau of Reclamation have 91%, 96%, and 99% of their employees outside of the DC region, respectively? How does that comport with the claim that the agencies need to be closer to the people?