

**Statement of
Mark D. Green
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Human Capital and Diversity
And Chief Human Capital Officer
U.S. Department of the Interior
Before the
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Regarding
The Department of the Interior's Remote and Telework Policies**

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Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of the Interior's longstanding telework and remote work policies. I am Mark Green, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Human Capital and Diversity and Chief Human Capital Officer at the Department. After my 24-year career at the United States Army, I worked for the U.S. Forest Service and have been in my current position for the last year.

Since Congress enacted the Telework Enhancement Act in 2010, the Department has supported a telework program across our bureaus and offices that allows agency employees, with the agreement and approval of their supervisors, to engage in appropriate telework and remote work opportunities. Briefly, telework may be authorized only to the extent that an approved telework arrangement does not diminish employee or organizational performance, and any agreement must be reviewed by the employee's first-line supervisor to determine whether the proposed agreement is in the best interest of the Department's mission.

The Department continues to refine this telework program by implementing government-wide best practices, providing training to supervisors and employees, and improving our information technology infrastructure.

These refinements and investments in our telework programs enabled the Department to quickly move our workforce to a maximum telework posture, while maintaining mission-critical functions, to minimize face-to-face interactions in March 2020, at the outset of the COVID-19

Pandemic. These actions complied with the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) guidance related to that emergency, including OMB M-20-13, OMB M-20-15, OMB M-20-16 among others.

Throughout the Pandemic, the Department's workforce of approximately 70,000 dedicated employees across 2,400 different geographic locations continued to deliver the Department's mission to protect and manage the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provide scientific and other information about those resources; and honor its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Affiliated Island Communities.

The Department's dedicated employees remained resilient throughout a very difficult time, managing and maintaining more than 400 national park units, 550 national wildlife refuges, 475 critical infrastructure dams providing water to farmers and drought-stricken areas, and 480 million acres of public lands for the American people. Over 5,600 wildland fire personnel continued to fight fires on our lands and in our parks and the Department's more than 7,000 law enforcement officers and park rangers served and protected over 500 million visitors to the lands and waters under the Department's stewardship in 2020 and 2021. Scientists and field technicians also continued to gather data, and work in their laboratories. The Department's employees continued their important work under very challenging and unprecedented conditions, and, for doing so, we are, and should be, very proud of them.

The Department's workforce is made up of employees performing almost every type of job in the Federal government, and we have a substantial number of people who work in-person, on the ground or at Department facilities, every day. About 55 percent of our workforce consists of customer-facing employees who provide core, mission delivery functions within our public lands, recreation areas, parks, and wildlife refuges. These employees are generally not eligible for regular telework and are not eligible for remote work because their jobs require them to be onsite for face-to-face interactions with the public and for work which must be performed on-site by its nature.

A smaller portion of our workforce performs mission support roles that are not public facing and are often able to perform their duties in a telework or remote posture. These mission support employees, in occupations such as information technology, human resources, acquisitions, financial management, and other similar support jobs, possess highly portable skills and are in very high demand in both the public and private sectors. This group of employees is generally eligible for regular telework and in some cases remote work. The enhanced information technology infrastructure of the Department has allowed for us to effectively communicate and interact in a secure environment.

Over the past several months, the Department has been re-evaluating our work environment posture in response to the OMB Memo 23-15 and the conclusion of the public health emergency to ensure that our decisions regarding work environments continue to improve organizational health and organizational performance. In September, we implemented the requirement for all teleworking managers and supervisors in the National Capital Region to work in the office at least 50% of their time. In mid-December, we expanded this requirement and notified all non-bargaining unit employees in the National Capital Region that they will begin reporting to the office at least 50% of their time on February 11, 2024, ensuring that over 70% of employees in the National Capital Region will be working in person at greater rates. Nationally, according to the latest payroll data, Interior's workforce is performing work in-person 65% of their regular work hours.

As the Department looks to the future of work, the Department has also partnered with the General Services Administration (GSA) to work to maximize the efficient use of both Department-owned and GSA-provided spaces by various strategies. In the past year, the Department developed a Future of Workspace Strategy and, in partnership with GSA, chartered multiple implementation teams at high-priority locations that are tasked with identifying space reduction targets in administrative facilities.

As we work with OMB, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), GSA and other agencies, we continue to seek opportunities and to update our policies as appropriate. As noted above, the Department's current telework policy, Personnel Bulletin 21-07 (PB 21-07), establishes criteria

and procedures under which eligible employees may be authorized to telework and emphasizes that approved telework arrangements cannot diminish employee or organizational performance or impede mission delivery, consistent with the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 and OPM Guidelines. A copy of this policy is available on the Department's website at https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/elips/documents/pb-21-07-telework-program-final-7.23.2021_0.pdf.

We expect that the Department's future work environment policies, along with our use of telework and remote work flexibilities, will continue to evolve over time in response to job market trends and mission needs. Based on our experience before, during, and following the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe the hybrid workforce model can be one that works for the Department in the appropriate cases. In fact, for the Department to remain competitive for the talent we need in the future, especially in our mission support occupations, we believe it is essential that we continue to offer workforce flexibilities such as telework and remote work.

We recognize that our current hybrid workforce model may need periodic course adjustments and the Department's senior leaders remain committed to finding effective ways to enhance our ability to continually monitor, measure, and evaluate agency performance. While the Department's mission always comes first, we cannot make it happen and deliver for the American people without our amazing and dedicated workforce. It is because of our employees, and the passion and commitment they show for their work every day, that the Department was recognized in 2022 as among the top 10 large agencies in the Best Places to Work in the Federal government.

I look forward to discussing this important matter with this Committee and other stakeholders in Congress and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have today.