

Department of the Interior releases revised reorganization proposal

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On August 29, Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke released a revised reorganization proposal to establish twelve unified regional boundaries for agencies and bureaus in the Department of the Interior (DOI). Under the new structure, agencies like the National Park Service (NPS), the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) would consolidate their existing, separately-defined regions into the same regional boundaries. DOI's restructuring plan aims to reduce administrative redundancy, shift resources to the field, and improve interagency coordination between different agencies and bureaus under DOI. Secretary Zinke's reorganization plan was released in response to President Donald Trump's March 2017 executive order mandating executive branch reforms (E.O. 13781). The administration proposed \$18 million for restructuring DOI regional boundaries in the fiscal year (FY) 2019 presidential budget request and included the proposal in its executive branch reorganization plan released in June.

Discussed at a round table with Representative Rob Bishop (R-UT-1) in Utah on August 28, the plan is modified from the original restructuring proposal released in February, which was based solely on watershed boundaries. The new proposed regional boundaries now follow some state lines in addition to watershed boundaries in order to avoid dividing states like Utah and Colorado into different DOI regions. Additionally, the revised plan has one less region after dividing the original Upper Mississippi region between the Great Lakes region and Lower Mississippi Basin region (now the Mississippi Basin region). Overall, the plan will consolidate forty-nine different regions across DOI agencies into twelve.

At the roundtable, DOI's assistant secretary for policy, Susan Combs, stated that the reorganization effort will begin first with the region that includes Utah, based on the more than 13,000 employees who work for Interior covering four states, the amount of BLM land present, and the abundance of national parks and monuments. The restructuring will also involve moving the BLM headquarters from Washington, D.C. to a city in the western United States, where most BLM land is located. Locations being considered for the new BLM headquarters include Ogden, Utah, Grand Junction, Colorado and Albuquerque, New Mexico, but DOI officials have so far not committed to a new location.

Sources: Department of the Interior; E&E News; Federal Register; U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources.
