

Frequently Asked Questions about the DOI Reorganization

Updated as of 2-20-2018

Questions related to common regions

1. Why is Interior changing long standing regional boundaries?

A. We want to provide better management on a geographic basis to include critical components such as wildlife corridors, watersheds, and trail systems. The USGS has provided draft unified regional boundaries based on watersheds as a starting point. By having unified regional boundaries based on primarily on natural features like ecosystems and watersheds we can improve interagency coordination and citizen service, since all of our executives within a given region will have a shared frame of geographic reference.

Our objectives are to:

Reduce administrative redundancy and jurisdictional and organizational barriers to citizen service

Share resources more effectively

Devote a greater percentage of our budget to the field

Improve coordination among federal, state and local agencies

Facilitate joint problem-solving and effective decision-making

Make more decisions at the regional level, fewer in Washington DC

Increase responsibility, resources, personnel and authority in the field

2. Will all bureaus be affected by the new boundaries?

A. Generally, yes, but there are exceptions. Since Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) are focused on activity in the marine environment, they will be the least affected. The US Geological Survey has research laboratories located in particular parts of the country, but they provide nationwide services because of specialized expertise and technology. We will consult with Indian tribes about the extent to which the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education should be part of the unified regions.

3. When will the new boundaries take effect?

A. We expect the boundaries for the thirteen new unified regions will take effect in the second half of FY 2018.

4. Will there be a pilot of the new unified region concept? If so, where, when, and what will be its scope?

A. The current idea is to launch the concept in Alaska first, since it is a large geographic area, most bureaus are active there, all existing regional offices are already in the same city, and there is only one state government with which to interact.

5. When is the unified region concept going to begin?

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A. FY 2018, after we finish discussions with Congress, Governors, state and local elected leaders, tribes, and external stakeholders on the new regional boundaries.

6. When will the unified regions be fully implemented?

A. It will take several years, because there are a lot of details that will need to be worked out over time.

7. Will DOI break existing leases for office space?

A. Generally not, since we want to avoid any extra financial costs that may be associated with breaking existing leases.

8. When will the new regional hub cities be identified?

A. Perhaps as soon as the end of FY 2018, or more likely in FY 2019.

9. Has DOI spoken to General Services Administration (GSA) about what the new regional hub cities will be?

A. We have had a few very preliminary discussions, simply to get an idea about the range of available space costs and space availability in a few western cities. We don't plan any moves in FY 18.

10. Who will be in charge of each unified region?

A. There will be an Interior Regional Director who will have lead responsibility for each unified region.

11. What will be the scope of responsibilities for each Interior Regional Director?

A. The responsibilities will be to coordinate a specified set of mission and administrative functions that are common to more than one bureau within the region. While some functions such as NEPA compliance, permitting, and recreation management may be within the purview of all of the Interior Regional Directors nationwide, many responsibilities will likely vary from region to region, as a function of the work of the bureaus within a given region.

12. Will the Interior Regional Director control all decisions of all bureaus in the unified region?

A. No, only matters involving more than one bureau, as established on a region-by-region basis.

12A. Will the Interior Regional Director just be another layer of bureaucracy?

A. No, our intention is to short-circuit much of the traditional Washington DC-based bureaucracy, by giving the Interior Regional Director direct access to the Deputy Secretary. In addition, the Interior Regional Director will only be involved when a matter involves more than one bureau.

13. Will the unified regions lead to closing of any national parks, national wildlife refuges, national fish hatcheries, or BIA agency offices?

A. No. There will be little to no impact on these types of local offices that are tied to specific natural or cultural resources or Indian tribes.

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14. How will the new DOI unified regional boundaries affect other agencies like USFS, NMFS, EPA, and the Army Corps of Engineers?

A. We will invite other agencies to co-locate with us or designate liaison officers to each of our unified regions.

15. What will be the role of bureau directors and assistant secretaries after the reorganization?

A. Bureau directors and assistant secretaries will continue to have authority over national policy, budget, personnel, training, uniforms, workforce planning and related functions, as well as line authority over mission areas that are unique to particular bureaus.

16. How will the new regional boundaries affect relationships with States and Counties?

A. We expect these relationships will be improved since more decisions will be made at the regional level and not elevated to Washington DC for resolution.

17. How will the new regional boundaries affect relationships with Indian tribes?

A. We expect these relationships will be improved since more decisions will be made at the regional level and not elevated to Washington DC for resolution.

18. Will there be tribal consultations before the new boundaries are finalized?

A. Yes. We will develop a schedule for conducting formal tribal consultation during FY 2018.

19. Isn't it a problem if a single state is split into more than one unified region?

A. In most cases, a state is only within one of the unified regions. The exceptions are where there are overriding natural resource management benefits from having part of a state in a second region.

20. Will front line supervisors in bureau field offices report to a different boss as a result of the new regional boundaries?

A. No, however the Interior Regional Director for the unified region will be the ultimate regional decision maker for many bureau employees.

21. How will the new regional boundaries affect how employees do their jobs every day in the field?

A. The new boundaries should have very little impact on field operations, except that field level employees can expect more leadership support for taking steps to coordinate more closely with employees in their sister bureaus or other federal agencies that affect our mission in the field. There will also be less second-guessing of local decisions by officials in Washington DC.

22. If the Interior Regional Director is not from my bureau, how can he or she make responsible decisions affecting my program?

A. The Interior Regional Director will consider the advice of each bureau's chain of command within the unified region.

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23. Has the Department established standard operating procedures, MOAs, chains of command or organization charts on how the current structure will work within the new regional map?

A. We plan to work with current bureau regional directors and bureau leadership to determine the most effective and reasonable ways to operationalize the new approach. Any changes will need to be carefully identified and thoughtfully implemented. We expect that the arrangements may vary from region to region.

24. Would regional changes affect any statutory responsibilities?

A. We do not anticipate the need to change any bureau's statutory authorizations as a result of implementing unified regions.

25. Does the Department expect each bureau to be represented in each region? How will this work for bureaus that have limited or no responsibilities in a region (e.g. OSM in the insular region)?

A. We do not expect that every bureau will have a bureau regional director in each new region; we will let existing programmatic responsibilities be the determining factor in that regard.

26. What authority will the new Interior Regional Director in a unified region have with respect to the existing structure? Will the new Interior Regional Director be the responsible officer for construction projects, records, procurement, and other activities conducted by staff currently located in another regional office? How will this work? For example, if a current project or program is in the NPS Midwest Region, managed out of Omaha, and the project now is in the DOI Great Lakes-Ohio region, where would the management happen?

A. In general, activities or functions common to more than one bureau will be under the direction of the Interior Regional Director in that region. For major projects that are already underway it may be prudent to make exceptions on a case-by-case basis. As existing office space leases expire, staff associated with a regional office function will gradually migrate to the identified regional hub city in each newly designated region. That process may take years to play out, as some leases will not expire for another decade.

27. What if the project, agreement or plan was previously within one region, but is now split between two or more regions?

A. In these situations, the region that is designated the lead region will be the one whose staff and expertise is best positioned to bring the project, agreement, or plan to a successful completion.

28. How will the Department manage existing MOAs and MOUs with other agencies at existing regions?

A. Decisions to transfer the lead responsibility for a MOU or MOA with another agency will be made on a case-by-case basis. Considerations will include whether the agreement is geographic or programmatic in scope, and which of the new unified regions has the personnel or expertise in the best position to effectively implement the agreement.

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29. Considering most DOI bureaus have less than 13 regions, this would increase the number of managers. Would this require hiring more managers?

A. During the first year or so transition period it is more likely that a single executive might have responsibilities in more than one region. Over time, it is likely that the total number of bureau regional directors will increase so that all regions where a bureau has a significant presence have a senior manager located in that region. However, some of the new regional directors might be GS-15s or GS-14s as opposed to SESers, if their bureau's presence in the new region is relatively minor.

30. Do you expect an official in a current regional office to be responsible for more than one region? How would the chain of command work for this?

A. It is possible that during the transition period a single senior executive might have more than one supervisor. However, field offices of bureaus will only report to one individual.

31. Does this initiative require the reassignment of any personnel (e.g., will current Regional Director positions be changed)?

A. Generally no. We will want to make sure that there is eventually one Interior Regional Director in place in each region, and more broadly, that there is at least one SESer in each region. In one or two instances, that may involve the near-term change in duty station of someone now in the SES.

32. Who will serve as Interior Regional Directors for these new regions? Will this affect their position description? If there are multiple virtual bureau Regional Directors within a new Region, to whom will existing staff report?

A. Interior Regional Directors will most probably be career members of the SES. They will have position descriptions created that describe their responsibilities within the new region. Their particular responsibilities and therefore their position description may vary a bit from region to region as a function of the DOI work that is taking place within each region. Bureaus will continue to have bureau Regional Directors and their bureau field level chains of command will continue to report to them. The difference will be for mission areas or administrative functions that are common to more than one bureau within the same unified region, the people in the bureaus working in those mission areas or administrative functions will take direction from the Interior Regional Director. Supervisors in individual bureaus will continue to report to a Regional Director from that bureau. The Regional Directors will report to the Interior Regional Director for certain specified programmatic and administrative activity, and to their bureau director in headquarters on those matters not within the scope of responsibilities of the regional leader.

33. How will the bureau Regional Directors coordinate with counterparts in other bureaus in the same region?

A. Bureau Regional Directors will have their traditional authorities and upward reporting relationships for programs and functions not specified as being within the purview of the Interior Regional Director. For those programs and functions that they share with other bureaus within that region, they can and

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should coordinate with each other, but they will be ultimately responsible to the regional leader within that region.

34. How will the bureau Regional Directors coordinate with other bureau Regional Directors within their same bureau?

A. Bureaus will continue to have routine meeting of headquarters and regional leadership, and coordinate with each other routinely in order to accomplish their missions.

35. How will a bureau deal with stakeholders (including state and tribal governments) that were previously within one region, but now are split between two or more virtual regions?

A. Tribal governments will have one BIA Regional Director and one Interior Regional Director with whom they might interact, depending on the issue. In some cases, a state may find itself in more than one of the new regions. While at first blush that might seem problematic, decades of experience in the Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers indicates that the arrangement works.

36. The new regional boundaries map appears to split-up some Indian reservations. How does DOI plan on working with tribes that span two regions?

A. We believe we have made successfully adjusted the new regional boundaries so that Indian reservations, national parks, national wildlife refuges, federal reservoirs, or similar land management unit are in just one of the new regions. If we have somehow failed to accomplish that goal in a particular place, we would like to know about it so we can address the situation.

37. As this is a policy decision affecting tribes, will DOI consult with tribes on this under EO 13175?

A. Yes, DOI plans to consult with tribes before BIA and BIE are incorporated into the new regional management concept and the new regional boundaries. This may mean that BIA and BIE would be involved in the reorganization on a separate, more extended timeline, than the other bureaus.

38. As these regions were designed to address ecosystem-based management, how would this reorganization address tribal needs and help DOI fulfill trust responsibilities?

A. Indian reservations exist in unique geographic areas, and while the topography within large reservations may span more than one ecosystem, a management perspective that is based on natural features and regional control rather than administrative boundaries with primary reporting relationships to Washington DC should result in better decisions for everyone, Indian and non-Indian, living in a geographic area.

39. What administrative simplicity would be achieved by using state-line based boundaries? Do the administrative benefits of using state lines apply equally to all agencies?

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A. The basic idea behind the new regional boundaries was to try to draw them based on ecosystem and physiographic features. Watersheds are well-defined and well-recognized natural features that serve as a reasonable approximation for ecosystems, hence the new regional boundaries closely approximate watershed boundaries. However, Governors, state and local leaders, and external stakeholders are much more accustomed to dealing with state boundaries than watershed boundaries, so for convenience the new regional watershed-based boundaries are often adjusted to line up with the nearest state boundaries.

General Reorganization Questions

40. Will the broader DOI reorganization happen all at once?

A. No, it will be phased out over several years so there is ample time for planning, feedback from Governors, Congress, and other state and local partners, and thoughtful implementation.

41. Will employees be forced to change their official duty stations?

A. No. Our preference is to gradually phase in any necessary geographic reassignment of personnel to minimize disruption to the current workforce. People most likely to be affected will be those in agency headquarters offices in the Washington DC metropolitan area. People working in field offices are the least likely to be affected.

42. Will people lose their jobs due to the reorganization?

A. Our desire is for no one to lose their job as a result of the reorganization. Some fraction of the small number of people who are given new assignments in a different geographic area may choose to voluntarily leave Interior instead.

43. Will DOI run a Reduction In Force (RIF) to accomplish the reorganization?

A. We have absolutely no plans to run a RIF.

44. Will there be early outs and buyouts to facilitate the reorganization?

A. To the extent OMB and OPM authorize us to use early outs and buyouts we may consider doing so.

45. Will people be required to move to a different city or state as part of the reorganization?

A. Some people will eventually be asked to move.

46. Will bureau headquarters functions be moved as a result of the reorganization?

A. The FY19 President's budget proposes to move a small number of headquarters positions in BLM and FWS Westward to an as yet unidentified location in order to gradually establish western headquarters for those agencies. In addition, a few more headquarters positions in the Bureau of Reclamation, whose headquarters is largely already in the Denver metropolitan area, will be moved to that city.

47. Will everyone in the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) headquarters be required to move out West?

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A. No, although over a period of years we expect to move the majority of FWS headquarters functions out West. In FY 2019, perhaps about 50 people in FWS headquarters would move West.

48. Will everyone in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) headquarters be required to move out West?

A. No, although over a period of years we expect to move the majority of BLM headquarters functions out West. In FY 2019, perhaps about 50 people in BLM headquarters would move West.

49. How many people in BLM will stay in the Washington DC headquarters, and in what functional areas?

A. We plan on consulting with BLM about what makes sense, but generally speaking, people working in functions like budget, Congressional relations, and external relations will be among those not moving West.

50. How many people in FWS will stay in the Washington DC headquarters, and in what functional areas?

A. We plan on consulting with FWS about what makes sense, but generally speaking, people working in functions like budget, Congressional relations, and external relations will be among those not moving West.

51. How much money is going to be spent on the reorganization in FY 2018?

A. In FY 2018 we do not plan to spend significant amounts of money on the reorganization. Instead, we will start off by operating virtual common regions.

53. How much money is in the President's budget for Interior to be spent on the reorganization in FY 2019?

A. The President's Budget for FY 2019 includes \$17.5 million for the reorganization. Of this amount, \$5M is associated with moving part of the BLM headquarters West, another \$5M with moving part of the FWS headquarters West, \$2.5M with consolidated some staff from multiple bureaus in the same building in Anchorage, Alaska, \$3M with moving more of the Bureau of Reclamation headquarters to the Denver metropolitan area, and the remaining \$2M to potentially relocate a small number of people to unified regional offices.