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# Opinion

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## Our View

# Biden moves BLM brass back to Washington

Last week Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced that the Bureau of Land Management is moving back to Washington, D.C., from Grand Junction, Colo.

Score one for the bureaucracy against the people it allegedly serves.

Ninety-nine percent of the 250 million acres managed by the BLM is West of the Mississippi River. Its decisions impact the livelihoods of people who populate rural communities but those decisions are made far from the forests, grasslands and high deserts they call home.

To those people, a headquarters staff ensconced 1,900 miles away in the nation's capital seemed remote. Its decisions often did little to dispel that feeling.

Members of Congress from the West, both Republicans and Democrats, have long advocated moving BLM headquarters out of Washington and into the same neighborhood of those huge swaths of public lands the agency manages. Other interests in the West agreed.

The logic was simple: If BLM managers



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**The Bureau of Land Management is moving its headquarters back to Washington, D.C., from Grand Junction, Colo.**

actually lived in the West and had a relationship with the land they managed, their decisions might be informed by first-hand experience.

The bureaucrats and the lobbying interests never warmed up to the idea. Critics maintain the BLM and other agencies need to be headquartered in the capital to be included in budget and policy discussions.

But having all those discussions in Washington is part of the problem. That's better for K Street lobbyists and the environmental special interests, but not so good for the people those policies impact.

In 2018, a bipartisan group of senators and members of Congress from the West formally proposed moving BLM's headquarters. During the Trump administration they got an ally in then Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke, a Montanan.

The Trump administration decided to move the headquarters under its own authority. The headquarters relocated to Grand Junction in August 2019.

Most of the career BLM employees decided not to make the move, opting instead for retirement or to transfer to other government agencies or departments. In total, the agency lost 287 of the 328 employees scheduled to make the move.

We appreciate the difficult position such a move placed on BLM employees. Moving families is always difficult. In Washington, many households have more than one spouse employed in government.

But government is established to serve the people, not the interests of government employees. Military families know well that service often requires the disruption of personal lives.

We think decision makers can best serve when they are among the governed, where they can see first-hand the problems and the impacts of policy. Too often those in the Washington bubble look inward rather than outward.

The Biden administration opposed the move, and its review unsurprisingly recommended returning the top brass to Washington.

Interior will keep the Grand Junction facility open as its permanent western headquarters, a bone to the Democrat Colorado congressional delegation. But the agency's decisions will be firmly rooted in Washington.

Government of the bureaucrats, by the bureaucrats, for the bureaucrats shall not perish from the earth — not without a fight.

## Our View



Wikimedia

**Mountain bike enthusiasts want to develop 3,000 acres of trails near Prineville, Ore., on grazing allotments in the Ochoco National Forest.**

# How not to build trails

People often see ag land as having "potential." They look at farmland or rangeland and start to imagine everything they could do with it.

Why, it could be developed into housing, or a shopping center — or trails. The possibilities are endless.

Except for one thing. That land is already in use.

The fallow field, the grazing allotment, the orchard or berry patch are all part of agriculture.

That land may have "potential" for someone else, but it's a means of making a living for a farmer or rancher.

That's why it's so inconsiderate and often downright insulting when someone comes along with a plan for building a trail through a farm, a ranch or even a grazing allotment.

It's not that agriculture and recreational trails are necessarily incompatible. It's just that there are a lot of considerations to take into account.

For example, if you've never been chased by a 2,200-pound bull, you may not appreciate the need for fencing, and keeping the gates closed.

Folks who see cropland may not appreciate the fact that at certain times of the year tons of manure may be spread on it. That could impact the enjoyment of a Saturday hike.

At other times, pesticides made be in use to protect those fruits or vegetables from pests or diseases.

That's why it's critical for folks who want to build a trail for hikers and bikers to talk with farmers and ranchers first, not after the steamroller has started.

The folks in Yamhill County, in Oregon's

Willamette Valley, learned this the hard way. The county leaders wanted to convert an old railroad line into a trail for hikers. The only problem was they neglected to work with the farmers who make their living in the orchards and on the farmland adjacent to the old railroad. Then the county tried to ram it through over the objections of the farmers. The state Land Use Board of Appeals rejected the trail plan three times.

That was, as they say, bad form, and county taxpayers have been paying for that mistake.

In Central Oregon, another type of steamroller is planned for national forest grazing allotments near Prineville. Mountain bike enthusiasts see the 3,000 acres as a great spot to enjoy themselves and their sport. They plan three trailheads that together could accommodate 120 cars and who-knows-how-many bikers.

The problem: they neglected to consult with the allotment holders on their massive plan. Had they done so, they might have found a way to make the uses compatible. But if you approach ranchers with a done deal that could pose a threat to their livelihoods and to the health of bikers being chased by cattle, you have created a big problem.

Farmers and ranchers are by nature good neighbors, but they need to be brought in at the beginning of the conversation, not after the plans have already been made.

Central Oregon mountain bikers would do well to slam on the brakes and start over on their aggressive trail plans.

And most importantly, they need to first talk with the people who would be directly impacted.

# Ranchers are right to expect more from WDFW

On Aug 26, 2021, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Kelly Susewind authorized the lethal removal of one to two wolves from the Togo pack territory in response to repeated depredations of cattle on public and private grazing lands in Ferry County.

This was a good decision and the right decision. Susewind's decision is consistent with the guidance of the state's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan and the lethal removal provisions of the department's 2017 wolf-livestock interaction protocol.

WDFW stated that the proactive, nonlethal deterrence measures implemented by these three livestock producers were those best suited for their operations in the professional judgment of WDFW staff and "WDFW staff believe depredations are likely to continue."

In a nutshell, what they are saying is ranchers have done what they have been asked to do and it is now time for the agency tasked with managing the wolves to provide some relief to embattled ranchers by removing wolves that have repeatedly proven they will not stop killing livestock despite everybody's best efforts.

This is the fifth time in the past four years Susewind has authorized killing Togo pack wolves. To date, WDFW has removed one wolf in four years of chronic conflict. There is recognition by wolf advocates, WDFW, ranchers, politicians, reporters and all interested parties that there exists a chronic problem that needs to be addressed.

What is being repeatedly debated seems to be, "What is the best way to put an end to the chronic problems that exist?" Doing the same thing that hasn't worked during the last 4 years doesn't seem like a workable solution.

The department has documented four attacks on calves since June 24, 2021, including three within the past 30 days. Ranchers believe there have been more depredations the department should have confirmed. The last documented depredation was confirmed on or around Aug. 16. WDFW then took 10 days to determine lethal removal needed to be authorized.

After lethal removal was authorized, WDFW biologists attempted removal, from the ground, with a rifle. This effort consisted of three days of hunting in a four-day period. The effort was halted because it had been 14 days since the

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last confirmed depredation.

At this point it is important to point out that 10 of those 14 days were spent with WDFW deciding what to do about a chronic problem that happens every year in the same manner. In 2018, 2019, 2020 and again in 2021 WDFW has justified decisions authorizing removal because depredations are likely to continue. After 10 days of hand-wringing, it seems inadequate to send out two department biologists who have repeatedly shown themselves to be unable to accomplish the task of wolf removal. It came as no surprise to ranchers that they didn't get it done.

In four years, Susewind has authorized lethal removal of Togo wolves five times because his experts told him they would not stop killing cattle. His experts were right; the Togo Pack hasn't stopped killing cattle. With five authorizations for lethal removal, WDFW has removed one wolf, and that was in 2018.

The wolf that WDFW did remove was injured. It was wounded by a rancher when it was caught attacking his livestock. Since 2018 the department consistently sends out the same people to facilitate the removal. The same people fail to remove any wolves. Every year the same people tell the world they stopped their efforts because they had done their job and changed the wolves' behavior. The wolves continue to harass and attack the ranchers' cattle and Susewind's authorization for lethal removal of Togo wolves has become meaningless.

Ranchers manage livestock and WDFW manages the wildlife. This is a wildlife management problem. It is time to stop heaping more burdens on the victims and address the problem. Susewind is right when he says, "Depredations are likely to continue."

Ranchers need to know what he intends to do about it. Most ranchers in northeast Washington have watched and learned many valuable lessons when it comes to involving WDFW in their ranching operations. I wonder if Susewind is content with what the ranchers have learned.

Scott Nielsen is president of the Stevens County Cattle-men's Association in northeast Washington.