

BLM moving back to D.C., reversing Trump-era decision

By **MATTHEW DALY**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Interior Secretary Deb Haaland is moving the national headquarters of the Bureau of Land Management, which oversees 245 million acres in Western states, back to the nation's capital after two years in Colorado.

The land management agency lost nearly 300 employees to retirement or resignation after President Donald Trump's administration moved its headquarters to Grand Junction, Colo., in 2019.

The bureau has broad influence over energy development and agriculture in the West, managing public lands for uses ranging from fossil fuel extraction, renewable power development and grazing, to recreation and wilderness. Its staffing has remained in turmoil after four years without a confirmed director.

The agency's space in Grand Junction will become its western headquarters, Haaland said. The Grand Junction office will reinforce western perspectives in decision-making and "have an important role to play in the bureau's



Grand Junction, Colo., and Mount Garfield as seen from the Colorado National Monument.

Jennifer Wan/Getty Images

clean energy, outdoor recreation, conservation, and scientific missions," the Interior Department said in a news release.

The changes, which will be done in coordination with Congress, will improve the function of the land management agency, help provide clarity for the BLM's 7,000 employees across the country and enable the bureau to better serve the American public and fulfill its mission as the steward of nearly one-fifth of the nation's public lands, Haaland said.

"The Bureau of Land

Management is critical to the nation's efforts to address the climate crisis, expand public access to our public lands and preserve our nation's shared outdoor heritage," she said in a statement.

"There's no doubt that the BLM should have a leadership presence in Washington, D.C. — like all the other land management agencies — to ensure that it has access to the policy, budget and decision-making levers to best carry out its mission," Haaland said. BLM's presence in Colorado and across the West will con-

tinue to grow, she added.

"The past several years have been incredibly disruptive to the organization, to our public servants and to their families," Haaland said, referring to actions by her predecessors, Ryan Zinke and David Bernhardt, to move the BLM to rural Colorado, sparking criticism that the Trump administration intended to gut the agency that oversees vast tracts of public lands in the West. Hundreds of longtime employees chose not to move to Colorado. Only three workers ultimately relocated.



Capital Press File

Jersey cows feed at a dairy near Gooding, Idaho. The dairy and cattle industries say a recent court ruling on CAFOs in Idaho won't impact them.

Idaho livestock industry: CAFO ruling won't affect operations

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

Environmental groups are claiming a huge victory in a court ruling last week that vacated the Environmental Protection Agency's general pollution discharge permit for Idaho concentrated animal feeding operations under the Clean Water Act.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the permit, citing a lack of sufficient monitoring of effluent discharges.

But dairy and beef cattle producer groups say the ruling won't affect Idaho livestock operations because they don't discharge effluent into waters of the U.S. and don't have that permit.

"Right now, because there are no permits, there's no impact to the industry," said Rick Naerebout, CEO of the Idaho Dairymen's Association.

At issue is the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit, which includes limits on pollutants discharged into waters of the U.S., along with monitoring and reporting requirements.

Last year, EPA issued a general NDDES permit for CAFOs in Idaho, which allows the agency to regulate numerous similar facilities in one permit.

It would hold any producers who want to apply for the permit to the same standard as anyone else — rather than applying for a costly individual permit, which requires the applicant to provide the expertise, Naerebout said.

If an operation were discharging into a water of the U.S., EPA would make it get a permit, he said.

To IDA's knowledge there are no dairy, feedlot or beef operations in Idaho that have an NDDES permit, to which the ruling applies, he said.

"It's a pretty clear indication our dairy and beef operations are already adhering to a zero-discharge standard," he said.

Food & Water Watch and Snake River Waterkeeper, which challenged the CAFO permit, are hailing the ruling as a "massive win."

"They're making much

ado about not nothing, but very little," Naerebout said.

"The environmental groups are holding out there that this is a big win. But from our perspective, they're just trying to use it as publicity and fundraising," he said.

Dairy and beef operations are already adhering to a zero discharge standard and don't have NPDES permits, he said.

"This decision doesn't change what our dairymen do on a day-to-day basis because they're already doing the right thing," he said.

Cameron Mulrone, executive vice president of the Idaho Cattle Association, said the court ruling won't have a drastic effect on cattle producers.

"There's no current impact because we don't have anyone that has one of those permits," he said.

If for some reason a cattle operation was found to be discharging contaminated water, it would have to apply for an NPDES permit. But no beef cattle operation in the state has that permit because they don't discharge, he said.

It's an accolade to livestock producers' waste management systems that utilize pen-designed ponds and slope to keep water on site as part of operators' nutrient management plans, he said.

Cattle producers are monitored under state nutrient management plans. They have to write a plan, update it annually and submit it to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture for approval, he said.

The environmental groups are "trying to applaud they had a big win," he said. "In reality it doesn't really have an impact. Our guys have been good operators, good stewards and haven't had to utilize that (NPDES) permit." His understanding is EPA Region 10 would have to rewrite portions of the permit related to what the court didn't feel was adequate monitoring, he said.

Mark MacIntyre, EPA Region 10 senior public information officer, told Capital Press the agency is not commenting on the ruling.

SW Idaho irrigators adjust as deliveries end early

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Southwest Idaho farmers juggled tighter water supplies in an irrigation delivery season that ended in mid-September, about three weeks early.

"It was a challenging year. They all are," said Dave Reynolds, who farms about 2,000 mostly gravity-irrigated acres spread across smallish fields in the Kuna area. "We shuffled volumes a little bit."

"We're still not as short of water as we could have been," he said.

Matt Dorsey, who farms in the Caldwell-Marsing

area, was among many who planned rotations based on nearly normal snowpack as planting season arrived. His irrigation district in July's second half cut allocations by about one-third.

"We made it through," he said. "We took a hit this year (on yield) just because of the cold, slow spring and weed pressure. Then it turned hot and stayed hot."

Alfalfa hay will continue to grow when irrigated less, Dorsey said. Cutting water does not work well for corn or seed crops that require filling of kernels or seeds.

Reynolds said one of his alfalfa seed crops "burned" a

bit, reducing yield, as he juggled water supplies. The crop doesn't perform well if it gets too wet, but getting it too dry reduces pollination efficiency and can turn it to hay.

He and his crew at one point chose not to irrigate a wheat field so they would have more water for higher-value sweet corn.

"Some crops did get hurt," Reynolds said. "You're on a time frame. You can run smaller amounts to make it through. You had to kind of choose between crops." He bought some water from others and used supplemental wells.

Dorsey harvested carrot

seed and most of his bean crop during the Sept. 12-18 week. He has started silage corn harvest.

"That is what some will do when they are short on water — take it for silage and not grain corn," he said.

Sid Freeman, who farms northwest of Caldwell, said using drip irrigation on sugar beets and onions nearly halved his water usage compared to a gravity system. And it enabled him to use less water than he was entitled to even after his district cut allotments by 20% at the end of June.

Dorsey said farmers "won't be able to irrigate in the fall, so if we don't get moisture in the winter, we will really be behind in spring."

Late-harvested crops often are followed by a fall planting of wheat or a cover crop to aid soil. And many seed crops — including carrot, turnip, radish, collard green and onion — are planted in late summer or fall so they can germinate and produce seed the next year.

Brad McIntyre, whose family raises crops, animals and fowl in the Nampa-Caldwell area, said the farm did not water as much as normal, but soil-health practices over the years "definitely helped stretch the water."

The soil keeps improving, including in its ability to hold water, and "every little bit helps in a year like this," he said.

McIntyre said the heat and reduced water supply "caused a lot more work. We were more intentional in how we were doing things."



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