



Key Cross-Cutting Policy Areas for the Department of the Interior in the Obama Administration

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The Department of the Interior is composed of eight bureaus, each which has specific management responsibilities for the nation's natural, cultural, and physical resources. Historically the eight bureaus have been managed as separate and independent entities, only rarely finding a need, opportunity or administrative requirement to interact.

The Obama administration is facing some significant challenges in the protection and management of the nation's biological, physical and human treasures.

Specific concerns include:

- Challenges posed by changing climatic conditions
- Challenges posed by expectations and need for coordinated Adaptive Management Programs
- Challenges posed by coordination, use and management of data and information

The intent of this white paper is to present some options for consideration in the Obama administration. The intent is not to create more bureaucracy – instead it is to identify how a reshaped Department of the Interior could save money, make more efficient use of its existing human and financial capital, and provide the ability to respond to the challenges and needs of the public, the Department, and clients.

Adaptive Management Coordination

Issue: The DOI is involved in multiple Adaptive Management Programs (AMP) across the United States (Everglades, Chesapeake Bay, Mississippi River, Missouri River, Grand Canyon, Columbia River, Central Valley and State Water Project and many other smaller examples). The reality is that these programs while implemented for all the right reasons (complex questions, inadequate or unsure data, and not enough time to evaluate all operational options); in the majority of cases they have not fulfilled the objectives. The reasons can be broadly lumped into three areas:

- (1) Failure for management and decision-makers to comprehend the complexity and need for operational/management experimentation
- (2) Lack of high-level leadership and commitment
- (3) Inadequate funding for monitoring and uncoordinated approaches



Policy Option: A Departmental level AMP coordination group should be established that would provide leadership and guidance in the implementation of DOI level AMP programs. This group, composed of representatives from each impacted bureau (NPS, BOR, USGS, FWS, BIA, MMS, BLM) would provide specific support in the implementation of existing policy, ensure consistency across scientific efforts, coordinate with NRC and GAO review groups, coordinate with other agencies (Commerce, Energy, EPA and Agricultural) and coordinate with Congressional committee staffs (since most of these AMP efforts are associated with legislation)

Staffing and Funding: A DOI level AMP group would be composed of representatives from each affected bureau ensuring coordination, consistency and leadership in assisting field groups in getting their work done. This group would be assembled to provide oversight and support to the DOI programs. No new staff would be required to implement this, instead it would be duties specifically affiliated with DOI staff already in place in WDC and the regions. They would coordinate directly with the specific field programs for annual reviews, ongoing consultation, and assistance to address specific issues and concerns.

Climate Task Force

Issue: DOI has considerable management and infrastructure responsibilities spread across the Nation and territories. Examples include levees, roads, dams, structures, pipelines, etc. There will be considerable challenges to managing and coping with impacts associated with climate change. DOI is responsible for the continued maintenance, operations, and management of elements of projects across the US. To date, the States have provided primary leadership in tackling climate change issues. For example, California has taken a forceful role in addressing both their Carbon footprint (addressing the problem) while also tackling the directly the challenges of rising sea levels, increased wildfire, and changing hydrologic regimes (development of adaptation strategy). There is much that can be learned from the State's efforts.

Policy Options: DOI has a responsibility to the American public to be active in respect to climate change. Tradition holds that DOI does not do anything until an emergency or crisis arises. In this case the crisis may be such that we end up losing critical infrastructure, species, or lives at a considerable expense. If we are protect the nation's resources we need to begin planning and acting. It is proposed that a Departmental level Climate Task Force, comprised of technical and administrative staff from each DOI bureau be assembled at the Denver Federal Center with adequate support, direction, leadership and responsibility to begin developing and implementing a strategic approach to the DOI's response to climate change. This cross-cutting, intra-Departmental group would be charged with:



- Identifying within each bureau potential management elements that will/likely be impacted by climate change
- Prioritizing those elements within each bureau
- Designing triage programs for specific species and their habitats
- Developing and implementing specific programs that each bureau can implement to reduce carbon footprint
- Developing and implementing specific programs to track and evaluate climate change tasks, programs, and proposals (mapping and data)
- Coordinate with other governmental agencies (Commerce, Energy, etc.) to ensure that programs are compatible.

Staffing and Funding: It is proposed that the DOI Climate Task Force be physically housed at the Denver Federal Center. Why? First, DFC is physically removed from areas that may be directly impacted by rising sea levels, hurricanes, and wildfires. Secondly, most of the DOI bureaus are already located there, key staff (scientists, GIS technicians, planners, critical thinkers) already exists in the area including NOAA and NCAR who are in Boulder. Lastly, academic institutions are in the area that could be used to augment specific technical reviews and research. Each bureau would be required to provide, through intra-bureau staff transfer, expertise to assist in the setting up and implementation of this group.

DOI GIS Coordination

Issue: A DOI multi-bureau GIS Lab is needed to facilitate the proper management of lands under DOI's jurisdiction. Managers in BLM, NPS, USBR, and USFWS manage over 800 million acres of land under their jurisdiction. Most managers do NOT know where the lands are and what resources are on them. DOI is in charge of managing these lands for multiple resources, issuing permits for drilling, grazing, mining and timber management while the public uses the resources for recreation such as hunting, fishing, camping, and access. Some lands are set aside as wilderness, refuges, and special areas and managed for endangered species or for critical landscape characteristics.

DOI currently manages by crisis. If an event happens, we go out and map. If a drill permit is needed, we delay the action until the environmental assessment can take place. USBR does not know how many scattered tracts they have and where they are. The recent canal failures that occurred in Nevada may have happened because managers failed to perform annual rodent surveys. Policies exist, but with GIS, the O&M schedule would be linked to the maps so as to make sure these important surveys were conducted in a systematic and prioritized basis to ensure safety of the public. Planners would have the base information available to facilitate management decisions for the betterment of the resources and the public.



Through the past two administrations multiple DOI mapping efforts have been initiated with good intentions, but none have followed through with the necessary support. Executive Orders, FGDC, IGDC, EGIM, REC.GOV and Modernization Blueprint all attempted to direct coordination. Lack of coordination, leadership, and inevitable turf agendas have led to less than satisfactory results. In general, NPS is on the right tract; BLM, and USBR are in a sad state of affairs and USFWS is somewhere in between. The scientists and mapping staff know how to achieve results, the problem is that the managers are not on board, funding is not coordinated, and coordination is lacking. All coordination committees will be reviewed for their relevance to the overall DOI-GIS goals.

Policy Options: In general, federal boundaries should be mapped in each agency with the same standard, and resources on the lands would be added as an NVCS overlay. Some specifics and special projects would take place as needed but would not hold up the progress of the mapping. In addition, assets such as canals and dams that would be mapped; land use info for permitting, PILT, leasing, endangered species, special management, recreation, etc will be added as information tables linked to the DOI-GIS data base. All this work would be planned out and completed in a cost effective fashion so managers on the ground in the regions and in headquarters would have this information available real time, for accurate decision making.

Staff and Funding: An effort like this could be underway without hiring any new government staff. It is anticipated that 4-8 FTE's from each agency would co-locate into an existing facility in Denver, Colorado. Several sites are available such as Bldg, 56, Bldg 810. A contract staff for additional support is envisioned. Coordination with the current USGS/DOI staff and agencies would kick off the effort followed by 3-6 months of determining what already exists, and prioritization of what needs to be done.

By definition, the lab would consist of an interdisciplinary staff, a Director, some support staff, a POC for each agency, cartographers, GIS professionals, photogrammetrists, contract specialists, and researchers. In addition, the DOI Center would have contracts available for photography, satellite imagery, videography, LIDAR, and training.