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From: POLITICO Pro Energy Whiteboard
Sent: Tue 6/20/2017 6:17:27 PM
Subject: Interior could cut BLM staff by end of this year

By Ben Lefebvre

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The Interior Department has told the Bureau of Land Management to prepare for staff cuts of 1,000 positions as soon as the end of this year.

Those cuts would be in line with the White House budget proposal released in May, although lawmakers have already said they did not intend to follow that guidance.

In a memo to agency employees, acting BLM Director Michael Nedd conceded that although the White House budget cuts for the agency have not been approved, staff should prepare for the reductions.

"We remain hopeful that the BLM can handle reducing the size of our workforce through normal attrition, retirements, and smart, selective hiring with an emphasis on trying to fill our critical vacancies from within our current workforce," Nedd said in the email. "To accelerate attrition, the Department may also seek authority from the Office of Personnel Management to offer early retirement and voluntary separation incentives later this year."

Neither BLM nor OPM would comment on the plans.

If implemented, the cut would eliminate 10 percent of BLM's staff. But the agency is already operating below full staffing, according to Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a nonprofit group representing state and federal workers.

"BLM is ridiculously thinly staffed," PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch told POLITICO. "They haven't had 10,000 employees for three years. They've already shrunk 10 percent since 2010."

Meanwhile, Congress has already said it would allot more money to Interior than the White House requested.

"I don't expect many of [the cuts] to become a reality, especially those that target popular programs," Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) told Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke during a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee budget hearing this morning.

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