

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Contingency Plan for Possible Shutdown of Government Functions

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The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the Nation. The BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

General: In the event that there is a lapse in current appropriations, many activities of the BLM will cease with the exception of law enforcement, emergency response functions, and operations necessary for the safety of human life or the protection of property, including fire suppression. Without appropriated funds, there is no authority to incur obligations, including obligations for salaries, except in situations involving orderly shutdown of the Bureau or to protect human health, life, and property. In the event that a government shutdown occurs, the Department will notify bureaus to begin an orderly shutdown of unfunded functions. This will require the furlough of many BLM employees. Voluntary services by employees cannot be accepted. Public lands will, in most cases, remain accessible to the public but not all services will be available during a shutdown. While it is our goal to provide access to visitors to the public lands, we cannot provide a full range of services at all locations.

The BLM has approximately 9,260 employees and would furlough approximately 7,000 employees. All furloughed employees will spend up to four hours completing shutdown activities, which include securing facilities, completing personnel and financial processes, notifying external partners and customers of the shutdown, and cancelling meetings/events. Employees will be in a furlough status immediately upon completion of shutdown tasks.

Consistent with guidance in OMB Circular A-11, the number of employees who will be retained as "excepted" (i.e., not furloughed) is approximately 500. Employees engaged in the following categories will be "excepted" and may continue to work on excepted areas of service:

- law enforcement;
- activities necessary to protect life and property that are not otherwise exempt;
- necessary functions to oversee or support excepted activities, including budget, procurement, communications, and associated finance, acquisition, and information technology (IT) services;
- emergency response;
- fire preparedness and suppression
- inspections and enforcement for oil and gas and logging operations, rights-of-way contracts, and the management of wild horse and burro holding facilities.

Exempt employees whose salaries are paid from permanent appropriations (receipts) and unobligated balances from prior years will continue to work as directed by their supervisors and subject to the continued availability of funds. There are several groups of employees in the “exempt” category who will continue to report to duty including employees: funded by the Helium Fund; working with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) on the Buy-Back Program; in Alaska working on the administration and regulation of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline; and working on selected energy, minerals, rights of way, grazing, and associated activities. Where keeping employees working is in the best interest of the Bureau and public health, safety and protection of property, employees or services authorized to use available recreational fees collected pursuant to the Federal Lands and Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), cost recovery, cost reimbursements, or prior authorized funding (carry-over), may be considered for exempt status. Adding or removing employees and services from the exempt category will occur subject to the availability of funds. An estimate of as many as 1,760 employees may work in the exempt category, including both full-time and on-call status, subject to available funding and workload requirements. Such decisions will be made on a site-specific basis, subject to fund availability. New funding obligations cannot be made after the shutdown, except those needed to protect safety, health, and property, such as fire suppression and HAZMAT emergency responses and fire protection.

Fire Management: Fire management staff is designated “excepted” for purposes of protecting life and property, as well as assisting with emergency services. Responsibilities of fire management staff include initial attack and extended attack suppression activities on public lands and lands for which BLM has initial attack responsibilities through agreements. As outlined in the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, Firefighter and public safety is the first priority. The consequences of ensuring firefighter and public safety and welfare dictate the appropriate response to wildfire. Fire management activities are limited to preparedness and wildfire suppression.

BLM states and districts will retain as necessary, depending upon the local conditions, fire personnel sufficient for initial attack capability. Additionally, this will include necessary dispatch personnel, the minimum overhead personnel and administrative staff to oversee suppression activities and coordinate supplementation of suppression staff as needed. The BLM’s National Fire and Aviation office will ensure adequate personnel are available to support any ongoing needs of the states and districts.

Emergency stabilization and rehabilitation will be handled in the same manner as other potential emergency situations such as hazardous materials incidents (i.e., a limited number of employees will be on-call to deal with emergencies).

Employee Travel: Any employee in travel status will follow the Department-issued guidance on travel.

Visitor Management: The BLM will close and secure visitor centers on public lands unless they are operated by a third party and do not require BLM staff support. The operation of each facility must be evaluated on a site-specific basis and in light of any contractual requirements.

Visitor services including trash collection and toilet cleaning may not be available at all locations. Any emergency work involving the safety of human life or the protection of property will be made on a site-specific basis and are subject to a review of available funds. BLM land will remain accessible to the public and efforts will be made to post signs, as appropriate, to indicate where services are or are not available.

Special Recreation Permit Authorizations and Concession/Commercial Recreation Leases:

Commercial, competitive, and group authorization for events and activities: Leases and some commercial outfitter and guide special recreation permits can continue operations as long as they do not need BLM field monitoring or regulatory oversight in the short term. No new activities or launches will occur unless they meet the exceptions discussed above. A limited number of new permit applications, modifications, and renewals may be processed. This will depend on the proposed timing of the event, whether it is a cost-recovery permit request, and subject to the availability of carryover funding. Cost-recovery events scheduled to occur during a shutdown, which would pay BLM staff salary, will be allowed to proceed. Certain events operating under approved special use permits with a cost-recovery provision may continue. If BLM staff support for the event is required, those employees may temporarily be placed on the exempt list for the duration of the event. Local BLM offices will notify permit holders of any changes.

Other events scheduled to occur during the government shutdown will be canceled, postponed, or suspended. Vendor operations will be suspended.

Individual permits in special areas: Use of permitted areas may continue; however, no maintenance or other services will be provided by the BLM. Any entry onto BLM land is at the visitor's sole risk.

Volunteers: Volunteer activities may be discontinued in cases where appropriate oversight cannot be provided.

Campgrounds and Other Recreation Sites: Campgrounds, boat ramps, and other recreation sites will be open. However, at some facilities the full range of services may not be available including, restrooms and water systems. In cases where funds are not available to maintain such services, signs will be posted but visitors may remain at these sites at their sole risk.

Recreation.Gov: The lapse in funding for the Federal government may impact your reservation and travel plans. Please be aware that if you have an existing reservation during this lapse of funding period, and the location is not fully staffed, your reservation may not be honored. We recommend you contact the local facility to determine if the facility is open or closed. Please consider that if you do make a reservation for the near future and the lapse in funding is not resolved by your arrival date, your reservation may not be honored, or others may have occupied your site. Refunds will be considered and processed after the lapse in funding resolves and the Federal Government opens.