

# Controversial BLM Chief Pendley's Tenure Extended Again Without Nomination, Despite Protests

The Bureau of Land Management oversees millions of acres and billions in energy revenues, but the Trump Administration has never nominated a director for it.



William Perry Pendley, who has been leading the Bureau of Land Management since July, has authored five books arguing for limiting federal control of public lands, including

Dozens of conservation groups called for William Perry Pendley to resign or be removed as temporary head of the Bureau of Land Management this week, but an order signed Thursday by the U.S Interior Secretary means that the self-described [Sagebrush Rebel](#) will remain at the helm for another three months.

Before Pendley took over in July as BLM's deputy director for policy and programs—exercising authority of the director—he had repeatedly sued the agency as head of a conservative legal foundation and attacked it in public comments and books.

He has advocated selling off public land and giving oil and gas companies access to more of the hundreds of millions of acres of subsurface natural resources the agency oversees. After members of Congress [raised questions](#) about conflicts of interest, Pendley, an attorney, agreed to [recuse himself](#) from work at BLM involving dozens of former clients, including farming interests and mining and energy companies.

Pendley has said that he has set aside his personal beliefs to follow directions from the Trump administration while at BLM. But the conservation groups argue that his views fundamentally contradict the agency's mandate to manage

some 245 million acres of land in the public interest and that his reappointment denies the U.S. Senate its advise-and-consent authority.

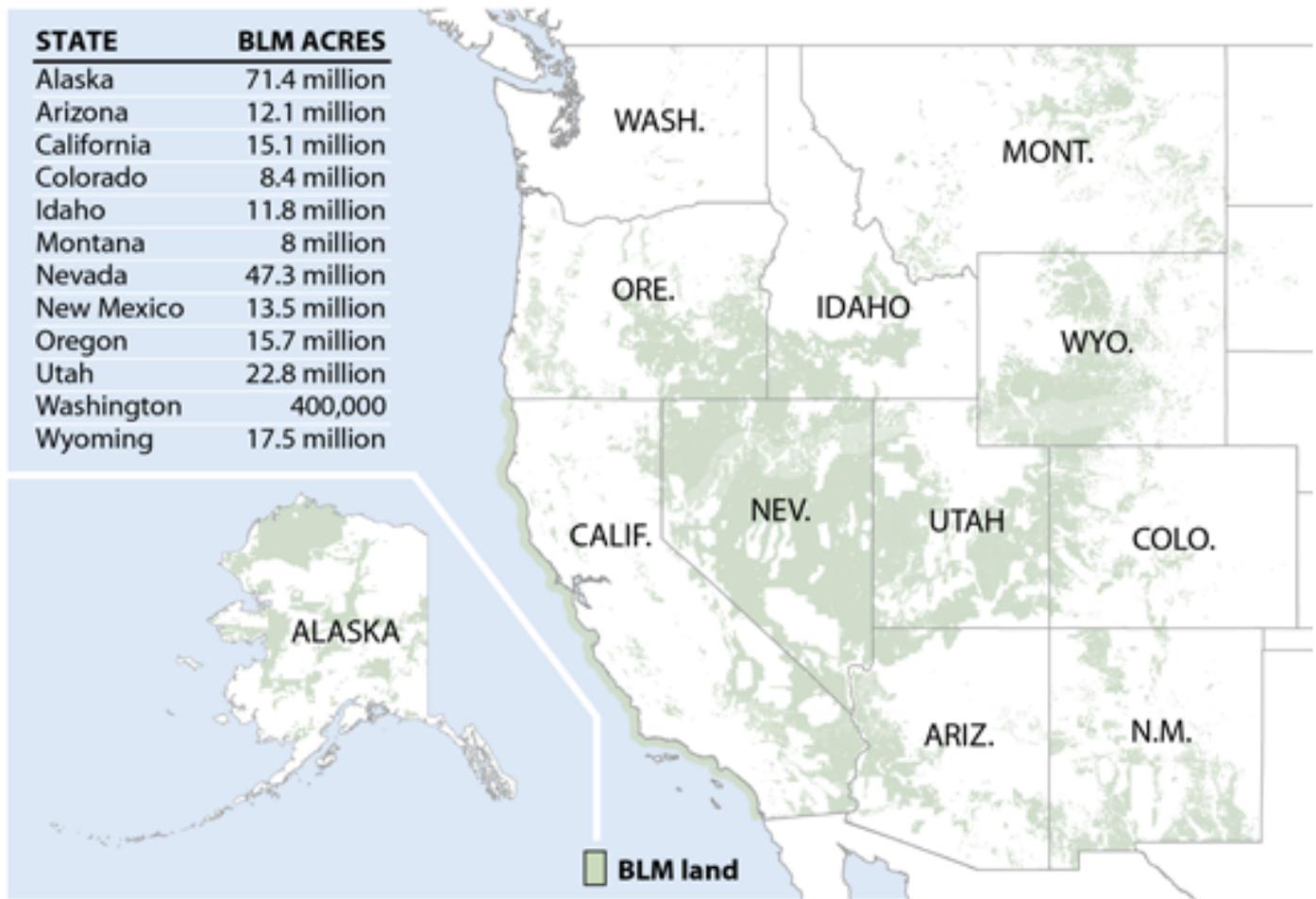
Ninety-one groups signed a Dec. 31 [letter](#) insisting that Pendley should step down or Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, a former energy lobbyist, should remove him from his role at BLM.

"Putting someone like William Perry Pendley in charge of what happens on these public lands is likely to just accelerate climate disruption," said Shelley Silbert, executive director of the conservation group Great Old Broads for Wilderness, which signed the letter.

Issues like wild horses, which Pendley recently called the biggest threat to public lands, "really pales in comparison to things like fossil fuel production from our public lands and the impact that has on our climate, both in this country and around the world," she said.

# BLM Manages Large Areas of the Western U.S.

The Bureau of Land Management administers nearly 245 million acres, or about one-tenth of America's land. Almost all of that is in western states.



SOURCES: Bureau of Land Management; The Pew Charitable Trusts

InsideClimate News

The Bureau of Land Management has never had a Senate-approved director of the BLM during the Trump administration. Instead, Bernhardt has filled the office with temporary leaders with limited authority.

Pendley's tenure had already been extended once. Critics say it validates their allegation that the Trump administration is effectively dismantling an agency that dominates energy development, grazing and mining in 12 Western states.

Neither the BLM nor the Interior Department responded to inquiries about the ["temporary redelegation"](#) of Pendley and

four other Interior Department officials on Thursday.

## **A Practice that Avoids Senate Confirmation**

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), an advocacy group, has gone to court to challenge what it sees as an improper and common practice in the Trump administration's Interior Department of re-delegating legal powers so agency deputies like Pendley are "exercising the authority" of agency directors.

PEER, which has campaigned against this practice and led the letter calling for Pendley's removal, argues that [only the president](#) can make temporary appointments for "acting" agency directors and those appointments can last just [210 days](#).

"Only a Senate-confirmed Director or a Presidentially-appointed Acting Director would have legal legitimacy to lead the Bureau," the coalition letter argues. "Deputy Director Pendley is neither of those. Further, his actions betray BLM's mission and demonstrate his lack of fitness to lead it."

Peter Jenkins, senior counsel for PEER, said his group has been pushing the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to end the Interior Department's temporary appointments.

# Conflict of Interest, Mismanagement Complaints

The letter, signed by conservation, public interest, wildlife advocacy and sportsmen's organizations, also points out a long list of issues that pose a conflict of interest for Pendley, who led the Mountain States Legal Foundation for three decades.

His past clients include the three Utah counties that have joined the Trump administration in court to defend its decision in 2017 to shrink the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments by more than 2 million acres. Silbert's organization is among the plaintiffs who say downsizing the monuments was illegal.

The groups also argue that he has mismanaged the [relocation](#) of more than 200 BLM headquarters positions to western states, where most of the agency's 10,000 employees already work, and the move of agency headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado. Members of Congress have criticized the move for causing a "brain drain" in the agency, with many employees likely to refuse reassignment, and for failing to provide Congress with cost-benefit justifications.

"The Trump administration has sent a very strong signal of contempt, not just for conservation but for every American

who values our public lands," said Erik Molvar, executive director of the Idaho-based conservation group the Western Watersheds Project.

He noted that Pendley has publicly [sympathized](#) with Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, whose dispute with the BLM led to an armed standoff with the BLM over unpaid federal grazing fees in 2014. Molvar also pointed to an op-ed by Pendley in the [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#) last October that said federal law enforcement should defer to local law enforcement officials, some of whom dispute federal authority on public lands.

"It sends the clear and unmistakable message that the Bundy movement and commercial exploiters of public lands are probably in control of the Interior Department and are directing the Bureau of Land Management through William Perry Pendley," Molvar said.