

Common Regional Boundaries

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is Interior changing long standing regional boundaries?

A. We want to provide better management on an ecosystem basis to include critical components such as wildlife corridors, watersheds, and trail systems. The USGS has provided draft regional boundaries based on based on watersheds as a template. By having common regional boundaries based on natural features like ecosystems and watersheds we can improve interagency coordination and citizen service, since all of our executives within a given region will have a shared frame of geographic reference. We also believe common regions will make us more efficient, which would be helpful given our continuing budget pressures. With more decisions made at the regional level and fewer in Washington DC, we hope the public will conclude that we are making better decisions.

2. Will all bureaus be affected by the new boundaries?

A. Generally yes, but since Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) are focused on activity in the marine environment, they will be the least affected.

3. When will the new boundaries take effect?

A. We expect the boundaries for the thirteen new common regions will take effect in the second half of FY 2018.

4. Will there be a pilot of the new common region concept? If so, where, when, and what will be its scope?

A. The current idea is to launch the concept in Alaska first, since it is a large geographic area, most bureaus are active there, all existing regional offices are already in the same city, and there is only one state government with which to interact.

5. When will the common regions be fully implemented?

A. It will take several years, because there are lots of details that will need to be worked out over time.

6. Will DOI break existing leases for office space?

A. Generally not, since we want to avoid any extra financial costs that may be associated with breaking existing leases.

7. When will the new regional hub cities be identified?

A. Perhaps as soon as the second half of FY 2018.

8. Has DOI spoken to General Services Administration (GSA) about what the new regional hub cities will be?

A. We have had a few very preliminary discussions, simply to get an idea about the range of available space costs and space availability in a few western cities. We don't plan any moves in FY 18.

9. Who will be in charge of each common region?

A. There will be a regional leader who will have lead responsibility for each common region.

10. What will be the scope of responsibilities for each regional leader?

A. The responsibilities will be to coordinate a specified set of mission and administrative functions that are common to more than one bureau within the region.

11. Will the regional leader control all decisions of all bureaus in the common region?

A. No, only matters involving more than one bureau.

12. Will the common regions lead to closing of any national parks, national wildlife refuges, national fish hatcheries, or BIA agency offices?

A. No. There will be little to no impact on these types of local offices that are tied to specific natural or cultural resources or Indian tribes.

13. How will the new DOI common regional boundaries affect other agencies like USFS, NMFS, EPA, and the Army Corps of Engineers?

A. We will invite other agencies to co-locate with us or designate liaison officers to each of our common regions.

14. What will be the role of bureau directors and assistant secretaries after the reorganization?

A. Bureau directors and assistant secretaries will continue to have authority over national policy, budget, personnel, training, uniforms, workforce planning and related functions, as well as line authority over mission areas that are unique to particular bureaus.

15. How will the new regional boundaries affect relationships with States and Counties?

A. We expect these relationships will be improved since more decisions will be made at the regional level and not elevated to Washington DC for resolution.

16. How will the new regional boundaries affect relationships with Indian tribes?

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17. Will there be tribal consultations before the new boundaries are finalized?

A. Yes.

18. Isn't it a problem if a single state is split into more than one common region?

A. No, since there is ample evidence that this works fine in practice, based on decades of experience with the current regional boundaries of the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers.

19. Will front line supervisors in bureau field offices report to a different boss as a result of the new regional boundaries?

A. No, however the regional leader for the common region will be the ultimate regional decision maker for many bureau employees.

20. How will the new regional boundaries affect how employees do their jobs every day in the field?

A. The new boundaries should have very little impact on field operations, except that field level employees can expect more leadership support for taking steps to coordinate more closely with employees in their sister bureaus or other federal agencies that affect our mission in the field.

21. If the regional leader is not from my bureau, how can he or she make responsible decisions affecting my program?

A. The regional leader will be able to consider the advice of each bureau's chain of command within the common region.

22. Has the Department established standard operating procedures, MOAs, chains of command or organization charts on how the current structure will work within the new regional map?

A. We plan to work with current regional directors and bureau leadership to determine the most effective and reasonable ways to operationalize the new approach. Any changes will need to be carefully identified and thoughtfully implemented.

23. Would regional changes affect any statutory responsibilities?

A. We do not anticipate the need to change any bureau's statutory authorizations as a result of implementing common regions.

24. Does the Department expect each bureau to be represented in each region? How will this work for bureaus that have limited or no responsibilities in a region (e.g. OSM in the insular region)?

A. We do not expect that every bureau will have a regional director in each new region; we will let existing programmatic responsibilities be the determining factor in that regard.

25. What authority will the new common regions have versus the existing structure? Will the new regional leader be the responsible officer for construction projects, records, procurement, and other activities conducted by staff currently located in another regional office? How will this work? For example, if a current project or program is in the NPS Midwest Region, managed out of Omaha, and the project now is in the DOI Great Lakes-Ohio region, where would the management happen?

A. In general, activities or functions common to more than one bureau will be under the direction of the regional leader in that region. For major projects that are already underway it may be prudent to make exceptions on a case-by-case basis. As existing office space leases expire, staff associated with a regional office function will gradually migrate to the identified regional hub city in each newly designated region.

26. What if the project, agreement or plan was previously within one region, but is now split between two or more regions?

A. In these situations, the region that is designated the lead region will be the one whose staff and expertise is best positioned to bring the project, agreement, or plan to a successful completion.

27. How will the Department manage existing MOAs and MOUs with other agencies at existing regions?

A. Decisions to transfer the lead responsibility for a MOU or MOA with another agency will be made on a case-by-case basis. Considerations will include whether the agreement is geographic or programmatic in scope, and which of the new regions has the personnel or expertise in the best position to effectively implement the agreement.

28. Considering most DOI bureaus have less than 13 regions, this would increase the number of managers. Would this require hiring more managers?

A. During the first year or so transition period it is more likely that a single manager might have responsibilities in more than one region. Over time, it is likely that the total number of bureau regional directors will increase so that all regions where a bureau has a significant presence have a senior manager located in that region. However, some of the new regional directors might be GS-15s as opposed to SESers, if their bureau's presence in the new region is relatively minor.

29. Do you expect an official in a current regional office to be responsible for more than one region? How would the chain of command work for this?

A. It is possible that during the transition period a single senior executive might have more than one supervisor. However, field offices of bureaus will only report to one individual.

30. Does this initiative require the reassignment of any personnel (e.g., will current Regional Director positions be changed)?

A. Generally no. We will want to make sure that there is eventually one regional leader in place in each region, and more broadly, that there is at least one SESer in each region. In one or two instances, that may involve the near-term change in duty station of someone now in the SES.

31. Who will serve as regional leaders for these new regions? Will this affect their position description? If there are multiple virtual RDs within a new Region, to whom will existing staff report?

A. Regional leaders will be career or non-career members of the SES. They will have position descriptions created that describe their responsibilities within the new region. Their particular responsibilities and therefore their position description may vary a bit from region to region as a function of the DOI work that is taking place within each region. Bureaus will continue to have Regional Directors and their bureau chains of command will report to them. The difference will be for mission areas or administrative functions that are common to more than one bureau within the same region, the Regional Directors for those bureaus will take direction from the regional leader. Supervisors in individual bureaus will continue to report to a Regional Director from that bureau. The Regional Directors will report to the regional leader for certain specified programmatic and administrative activity, and to their bureau director in headquarters on those matters not within the scope of responsibilities of the regional leader.

32. How will the bureau Regional Directors coordinate with counterparts in other bureaus in the same region?

A. Bureau Regional Directors will have their traditional authorities and upward reporting relationships for programs and functions not specified as being within the purview of the regional leader. For those programs and functions that they share with other bureaus within that region, they can and should coordinate with each other, but they will be ultimately responsible to the regional leader within that region.

33. How will the bureau Regional Directors coordinate with other Regional Directors within their same bureau?

A. Bureaus will continue to have routine meeting of headquarters and regional leadership, and coordinate with each other routinely in order to accomplish their missions.

34. How will a bureau deal with stakeholders (including state and tribal governments) that were previously within one region, but now are split between two or more virtual regions?

A. Tribal governments will have one BIA Regional Director and one regional leader with whom they might interact, depending on the issue. In some cases a state may find itself in more than one of the new regions. While at first blush that might seem problematic, decades of experience in the Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers indicates that the arrangement works.

35. The new regional boundaries map appears to split-up reservations (Uintah and Ouray, Colville, Yakama, etc.) How does DOI plan on working with tribes that span two regions?

A. We believe we have made successfully adjusted the new regional boundaries so that no Indian reservation, national park, or similar land management unit is in more than one of the new regions. If we have somehow failed to accomplish that goal in a particular place, we would like to know about it so we can address the situation.

36. As this is a policy decision affecting tribes, will DOI consult with tribes on this under EO 13175?

A. Yes, DOI plans to consult with tribes before BIA and BIE are incorporated into the new regional management concept and the new regional boundaries.

37. As these regions were designed to address ecosystem-based management, how would this reorganization address tribal needs and help DOI fulfill trust responsibilities?

A. Indian reservations exist in unique geographic areas, and while the topography within large reservations may span more than one ecosystem, a management perspective that is based on natural features and regional control rather than administrative boundaries with primary reporting relationships to Washington DC should result in better decisions for everyone, Indian and non-Indian, living in a geographic area.

38. What administrative simplicity would be achieved by using county-line based boundaries? Do the administrative benefits of using county lines apply equally to all agencies?

A. The basic idea behind the new regional boundaries was to try to draw them based on ecosystem and physiographic features. Watersheds are well-defined and well-recognized natural features that serve as a reasonable approximation for ecosystems, hence the new regional boundaries closely approximate watershed boundaries. However, human beings are much more accustomed to dealing with county boundaries than watershed boundaries as they lead their daily lives, so for convenience the new regional watershed-based boundaries are adjusted to line up with county boundaries.

39. **Do any bureaus currently draw regional boundaries along county lines?**

A. Most DOI's bureaus have historically drawn regional boundaries along state lines.