

2019 Department of Interior Senior Executive Service Survey

Essay responses

The biggest problem or challenge now facing DOI is:

1. Lack of consistent leadership.
2. Inexperience, lack of competence, and extreme political influence by the current group of appointees—whether confirmed or acting. They place no value or trust in the career SES and other leaders within the Bureaus.
3. The biggest problem is resistance to change. This Department needs to adapt to current times. Strategic vision and focus could be better. It doesn't matter the administration, leaders are committed to this Department. I would have had similar scores w/the last Administration.
4. Politically driven micromanagement not trusting career managers to faithfully execute the Department's mission.
5. Retribution against SES who speak up.
6. "Leadership." Many big problems—the reorg and movement of agencies out of DC are just two. Career development and long term commitment to Congressional mandates are others.
In DOI none of the agencies have the same mission. Trying to organize into a "one size fits all" model will not work.
There has been and continues to be a complete lack of respect and trust for career employees
7. Impaired scientific integrity at USGS.
8. Too many to list.
9. Credibility w/reorganizing as there is no "plan."
Not capturing the opportunity to push decision making to the "field" or lower in organization. Missed opportunity to "flatten" highest level of organization through fewer regions.
Regional creep will occur w/12 regions as the eventual "we need staff" takes hold. Employees think it is a joke to focus on window signs and business cards with no execution of plans.
DOI is influencing decisions w/political perspective rather than science based and informed.

Funding for DOI regions will come at the expense of agencies. Means less fiscal resources making it to the important work of local actions.

10. Lack of resources (\$) to accomplish mission(s)
11. Morale of career SES & career staff is abysmally low
12. Across the administration, and within DOI., the political leadership appears to have a disdain for Federal employees, especially those in Washington DC. The results vary, from new OPM policies that result in downgrades, to reductions in staff, to a lack of communication and consultation, mistrust, re-alignments and re-organizations that appear politically motivated and lack a concrete business case, the devaluing of advice, experience and even evidence offered by employees, etc.

The existing Federal workforce is seen as an impediment to achieving the political goals. Therefore, new policies and directions are imposed without input and accelerated to achieve as many political objectives as possible.

In many cases, the current political leadership lacks competence and basic leadership skills. Without the “check” from Congress (“check & balance”) this agency, and my bureau, would be significantly damaged. The programs have remained intact (for now) because of support from Congress. Long-term however, should the current leadership continue, I fear that the DOI will experience setbacks that will take a generation to recover from.

13. Loss of institutional knowledge and experienced staff. They—the DOI leadership—are silencing the voices of those that are knowledgeable/experienced who know their subject matter - what’s good, right or wrong, & will speak up. So they are transferring them out or making it so unbearable to work there they quit.

Decisions are thought out politically not what’s based on the situation at hand. For instance, DOI is so intent on moving BLM to CO that it will do so as a matter of pride, than proven benefits. For example, they signed the lease in CO knowing beforehand the space will not accommodate the first wave of feds being transferred to Grand Junction. They agreed to the landlord’s/owner’s caveat to give up ½ his floor in the building (that he currently occupies) to meet the minimum BLM need. Plus, they’ve (DOI) said, again, before signing the lease, major construction is needed on the existing space to meet the needs of employees (i.e. offices are too small). How much extra cost is there to the US government? They never should have signed the lease that wasn’t fully suitable or inadequate.