

## NOTES FROM ZINKE'S VISIT TO DFC

July 21, 2017

USGS staff in Denver had the honor of hosting Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke last Friday and learned a lot about his plans for the future of DOI, along with how much respect he has for USGS science.

Secretary Zinke held a luncheon meeting with the DOI SESers in the Denver area, and then toured the USGS Nuclear Reactor facility along with the Core Research Center and National Ice Core Lab, prior to holding a DOI All Hands at Bicentennial Park attended by an estimated 400 plus employees.

Zinke was very engaged in the facilities he toured, asking several questions and introducing himself to staff around the room. His geology background was apparent in several instances, most notably in the tour of the Rock Core Lab and the NICL. He was impressed by the large number of rock core samples (donated by several sources) that are stored at USGS, and are sometimes pulled from the archive/storage and re-analyzed when advances in technology make oil/gas extraction more feasible and profitable. He said he was a hard rock geologist.

While touring the nuclear reactor, he pointed out that he studied under Gordon Gould at the University of Oregon. Professor Gould is recognized as an early pioneer of the LASER and the use of neutron activation. Zinke had Laura, the DOI Head of Communications, take his picture by the poster at the entrance to nuclear reactor, which described neutron activation. He told Laura, "We'll do a

story on this later”.

Zinke is very emphatic about being number one... He made several references to his military experience (he was a SEAL and spent 23 years in the Navy, retiring as a Commander) and playing college football (he attended the University of Oregon on a football scholarship).

## **Notes from Luncheon with DOI SESers**

There's a need to reorganize DOI because of pressure on public lands. Recreation needs to be taken into consideration. Need to look at how we manage land. There are 300 million visitors to the National Parks each year and about 500 million visitors to all of the DOI public lands. In the future, this number will increase significantly. How will we manage this?

Wants to have all DOI field offices report to Joint Management Areas (JMA) based on watersheds. Employees would be co-located and functions integrated, there would also be liaison functions. Divide country into 13 regions (JMAs) with a common model for all JMAs. Leadership at the JMA Offices could change or rotate between bureaus in the JMAs. The JMAs will have a focus on operations.

16 percent of DOI employees are retirement eligible right now. 40 percent will be retirement eligible in 5 years. We can move jobs from Wash DC or Denver to the JMAs as employees retire or leave via attrition. We will not have to RIF employees. Zinke believes the DOI organization is an up-side-down pyramid—there are too many high graded employees. There needs to be more lower grades and they need to be in the field. Example, when a GS-14 retires, we should hire a GS-6 or 9. He put a freeze on hiring in Wash DC and Denver to avoid hiring people in those locations, then having them move out to a JMA. He would rather move the vacant positions to the JMAs and fill them there. If you have a pressing need to fill a vacancy at Wash DC or Denver, there is a waiver process which provides for that. Zinke said they had been approving lots of waivers.

The President and the VP have approved the Secretary's plan to reorganize and create JMAs. JMAs will all be a bit different reflecting the populations/issues in the area.

Goal is to have power (decision making) outside of DC because no one likes to be micromanaged. We need to give the people at the front lines more authority for making decisions. We need to get better at making joint decisions at DOI. We need more people on the front lines where DOI services are delivered to the public. Zinke does not like to see budget cuts made at the front lines.

We need to address road maintenance and other infrastructure issues. He said there was an increase in the President's budget for infrastructure.

The DOI reorg will start in FY 19. Regions will be based on watersheds and wildlife corridors. We are going back to John Wesley Powell. USGS providing maps to assist in defining the regions (also called Joint Management Areas).

They are looking to select 2 to 3 cities in each of the 13 regions which will compete to be site of the regional/JMA office. Cities have to be no more than 2 hops from D.C. (by air), affordable and with good community infrastructure. Birmingham, AL and Boise, ID are two good candidates. Some regions already have good a good DOI location, and those sites will likely be chosen as sites for JMA offices.

At USGS, scientists have been taken out of the field and moved to headquarters. We are going to return them to the field. Max told Mr. Zinke that there are 5 USGS science centers on the DFC (one water center and 4 geology centers). Two of the geology centers (Minerals and Geophysics/Geochemistry) are in sub-standard lab and office space and need infrastructure improvements badly. Later Zinke acknowledged that USGS needed infrastructure improvements. He also modified his statement saying that USGS scientists had been moved to HQ and the Regions, and we needed more scientists in the field.

JMAs will liaison with other federal and state agencies. Other Federal agency Secretaries are supportive. It will be easier to integrate DOI bureaus than other federal agencies.

There is no target on Denver but it is likely that some Denver employees will move to the JMA locations. Denver will probably have the headquarters for BLM, FWS and BOR. Secretary says he should have gotten out to visit Denver sooner.

Need to put more \$ into infrastructure. Should take care of our infrastructure needs within DOI rather than funding grants to outside entities.

Need to increase Revenue. 15 years ago, DOI brought in \$18 billion per year from offshore and onshore oil leases and permits. Now DOI brings in \$2.5 billion per year. Zinke wants to increase the revenues back to prior levels, and use the additional income to fix the infrastructure in the Parks (\$15 billion backlog) and in the rest of DOI (\$12 billion backlog). Zinke wants to restore the lost revenue in 3 years.

Zinke is concerned about the Everglades. The River of Grass used to be a major river, but now it is just a trickle. He wants to restore the Everglades.

Zinke does not like the two thick IG Reports on his desk. He wants to eliminate the problems identified in those reports. He has zero tolerance for harassment in the workplace.

Passionate about the public lands; won't sell them on my watch

Three key things I'd like to iterate/fix:

- 1. Trust** – DOI is the yep team - restore trust and confidence among public and employees. Why are we last (ref FEVS and Best Places to Work scores)? Innovation/discussion. Don't think my job is any more important than yours. Came from three generations of plumbers; we're a team. Never expected to be managing an organization of 70,000 people.
- 2. Infrastructure** – crumbling. NEED to fix. Increase revenue from leases/permits and use that money to fix DOI infrastructure
- 3. Reorganization** - Going back to Powell  
Fish comparison (trout and salmon in same river, with a dam upstream). The Fish is managed by NOAA, FWS, Corps of Engineers or BuRec. There is a proposal for NOAA to move to Interior. Also think it would be good if US Forest Service joined Interior  
Look at how we manage so we can be more integrated and operate jointly, Change will be initiated at the top, but execution will be done on the ground  
There is some goodness inf following traditions  
Co-locate/integrate and Liaison  
USGS- watersheds-13 areas Calls them Joint Management Areas  
16% interior retirement age NOW; 5 years from now - 40 % could retire  
As young millennials come in, what should 30 yr career look like?  
4 to 8 yrs – work in field at park or refuge  
4 yrs -- work at JMA in junior position  
8 yrs -- back to the field in a position with more responsibility  
4 yrs -- rotate back to a JMA in a more senior position  
8 yrs – serve as a Superintendent for a Park or Refuge, be Part of leadership  
Don't have to rife anyone  
If a GS-14 retires, let's re-hire at a 6...  
DOI has Great people/great assets – I'd be afraid if we didn't have those things

#### Q&A:

##### 1. Climate change?

Zinke: I'm a Geologist... I consider myself to be a scientist  
Climate is changing in ways we don't understand, no model to predict  
Man has had an influence; not particularly good; need to do it better; more research - investment/not expense  
Wind is great, BUT chops up 650,000 birds  
Natural gas is good  
Don't ever want your kids to see what I've seen overseas, there are no regulations that govern extraction of oil in the Middle East  
Force the world go to our standards for oil and gas development/extraction  
**Fund USGS better models - put \$\$\$ into research**  
**Science will lead us to that solution**  
**Greatest gathering of scientists ever**

##### 2. What do you think about Bureaus that generate \$\$ vs those that don't

Yes and no

Memorial bridge \$262 million project – will it happen?

Undervalued at door (entrance) to get people in the door at national parks

DOI should look at better ways

Too short in front lines, need more people on the front lines

Don't need the paperwork load - not value added

Public land - value added/transparent - trust but verify

Need Govt to hold people accountable

3. Use us (the DOI employees) to make America Great Again (blind gentleman from USBR HR Office offered to help Zinke accomplish his goals)

4. More science in field

Said USGS has moved the scientist to HQ and Regional Office locations,

Need more scientists in the field

Training – need more

What your career should look like over incremental periods

Dogs in the workplace – morale boost for millennials – first agency to adopt...

This dog friendly workplace policy will help us recruit millennials

5. Budget -\$15 billion behind infrastructure repairs at NPS, about \$27billion DOI wide

Nobody liked the budget

Priorities different – need new revenue

Zinke said there was a \$50 million increase for critical/rare minerals in the budget

Money budgeted but have to take loan out to get \$\$

Exceptions – propose that DOI can keep some of the revenue from leases

And permits to spend on infrastructure

One size doesn't fit all

Washington can't figure all of this out

Zinke just wants to be #1 He doesn't like the low FEVS scores for DOI or the

Low Best Places to Work scores for DOI

If you see a broken mirror/window- don't ignore it, say something and get it Fixed.

6. How do you insure people have voices at the table that need to be there with difficult issues i.e. The wall

Tribal lands

Zinke is a big Teddy Roosevelt fan

Executive has powers - those powers are limited

1906 - Devil's Tower - antiquities act

Bears Ears is too big – just need enough land surrounding the object to protect

The object.

Should be an optimist - Denver not going away FWS, USBR, BLM headquarters may be coming out west to Denver. Most of their work is in the West. Need to be closer to those you service.

Need you!!

I'll be coming back to Denver quite a bit.

