

Changes at the top at the Bureau of Land Management

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William Perry Pendley is out as the director of the Bureau of Land Management.

The United States District Court for the District of Montana issued a decision that enjoins Pendley from exercising authority as the director of the BLM. The Court declared that Pendley served unlawfully as the acting director for the BLM for 424 days.

On Sept. 25, chief district judge Brian Morris of the U.S. District Court of Montana ruled against Pendley in a 34-page decision, stating that Pendley's unconfirmed appointment violates the Federal Vacancies Reform Act, which limits how long a temporary official can fill a vacant federal position without Senate confirmation.

"[Pendley's] ascent to acting BLM director did not follow any of the permissible paths set forth by the U.S. Constitution," Morris ruled. "Pendley has not been nominated by the president and has not been confirmed by the Senate."

Pendley has drawn criticism among environmentalists for his views on climate change and opinions about how the government should manage public lands. Under his direction, the BLM offered hundreds of leases to oil and gas companies on lands designated as wildlife habitat, according to the Sept. 25 court ruling.

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In 2009, Pendley expressed disagreement with court decisions protecting Native Americans' religious rights on federally controlled land at a July 11, 2009 Republican Breakfast Forum reproduced on YouTube at <https://bit.ly/36pczi8>

Montana Governor Steve Bullock, who filed suit July 20 to stop Pendley from exercising the authority of acting director at BLM in violation of the U. S. Constitution, called the Court's Sept. 25 ruling "a win for the Constitution, the rule of law, and our public lands."

He continued, "Montanans can rest easy knowing that National Public Lands Day [Sept. 26] will begin with William Perry Pendley packing his desk and vacating the Director's Office at the Bureau of Land Management."

Interior Secretary David Bernhardt was also enjoined from unlawfully delegating the authority of the BLM director.

Anna Peterson, executive director of The Mountain Pact, a six-year-old organization that mobilizes local elected officials in Western mountain communities with outdoor recreation-based economies, was pleased.

"We are thrilled by the federal court ruling that William Perry Pendley can no longer serve as Acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management," she said. "For over a year, Pendley, a climate change denier, has limited local input while ignoring science and experts in regard to decisions about our public lands.

"While mountain communities struggle to navigate the effects of the pandemic, he prioritized bailing out fossil fuel CEOs, gave the oil and gas industry special treatment and the opportunity to pollute without accountability, all while expediting requests from companies to reduce what they pay to drill on our public lands," she continued.

"An anti-public lands zealot who has spent his life's work trying to dismantle our public lands has no business overseeing our nation's precious natural resources. We're thankful our country's public lands, waters, and air won today," she stated.

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Andrew Weaver, Associate Editor of SNEWSnet.com contributed to this article. His story can be found at <https://bit.ly/36mlmAe>