

Bureau of Land Management

CONTINGENCY PLAN

September 2025



**Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Contingency Plan for a Potential Lapse in Appropriations
September 2025**

Overview

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the Nation. The BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

In the event there is a lapse in current appropriations, many activities of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will cease with the exception of law enforcement, emergency response functions, and operations necessary for the safety of human life or the protection of property, including fire suppression. Without appropriated funds, there is no authority to incur obligations, including obligations for salaries, except in situations involving orderly shutdown of the Bureau or to protect human health, life, and property. Voluntary services by employees cannot be accepted.

Public lands will, in most cases, remain accessible to the public but not all services will be available during a shutdown. While it is our goal to provide visitors access to public lands, we cannot provide a full range of services at all locations.

The BLM would furlough approximately 4,000 of its approximately 9,250 employees.¹ All furloughed employees will spend up to four hours completing shutdown activities, which include securing facilities, completing personnel and financial processes, notifying external partners and customers of the shutdown, and cancelling meetings/events. Employees will be in a furlough status immediately upon completion of shutdown tasks.

Orderly Shutdown

The functions and activities described herein are to be executed in accordance with all applicable statutes, regulations, policies, and delegations of authority. OMB provides guidance on how to prepare for and operate during a funding gap in OMB Circular A-11. The circular establishes two policies regarding the absence of appropriations:

- A prohibition on incurring obligations unless the obligations are otherwise authorized by law; and
- Permission to incur obligations as necessary for orderly termination of an agency's functions, but prohibition of any disbursement (i.e., payment).

During a lapse in appropriations, an agency will continue to perform certain functions and activities funded by available appropriations or other sources that do not require further Congressional action in an annual Appropriations Act. Employees performing these funded functions and activities are "exempt"

¹ Employees participating in the Deferred Resignation Program whose resignation dates extend beyond September 30, 2025 may be exempt to the extent there are sufficient available balances of non-lapsed funding, otherwise they will be furloughed.

from furlough. An agency may also continue certain unfunded (*i.e.*, lapsed) functions and activities if such functions and activities are justified under an exception to the Anti-Deficiency Act (ADA).

During a lapse in appropriations, employees may be “excepted” from furlough if performing any of following activities in absence of appropriations:

- Activities expressly authorized by law.
- Activities necessarily implied by law.
- Activities necessary to discharging the President’s constitutional duties and powers.
- Activities that protect life and/or property.

Examples of these “excepted” activities include:

- An orderly shutdown of the bureau when there has been a lapse in appropriations.
- Activities authorized by statute or another legal requirement expressly authorizing an agency to obligate funds in advance of appropriations.
- Activities that address emergency circumstances such that the suspension of the function would imminently threaten the safety of human life or the protection of property.

The Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management may classify personnel as "Excepted" to the extent these personnel perform activities necessary to protect life and property, such as activities to maintain public safety, national security, and law enforcement, including in response to the national energy emergency, or to the extent these personnel perform activities necessary for the continuation of other excepted functions, the suspension of which would significantly impair such excepted function. Personnel may also be classified as “Excepted” to the extent such personnel are necessary to enable the President to carry out his constitutional responsibilities, such as his duty to make legislative recommendations to the Congress, which includes work pertaining to the FY 2027 Budget. Personnel and activities classified as "Excepted" may be reclassified as "Exempt" to the extent non-lapsing appropriations are available.

All employees will communicate with their supervisor to receive assignments of duties or other pertinent information for an orderly shutdown. During a lapse in appropriations, BLM employees are designated in one of four categories that indicate employee responsibilities during shutdown. The four categories are:

1. **Excepted and Excepted On-Call** - Employees who are regularly performing functions related to the protection of life or property or supporting functions which continue with funding that remains available during the lapse in appropriations. where the suspension of the related activity would prevent or significantly damage the execution of the terms of the statutory authorization or appropriation even if those activities are not full time (the employee reverts to furlough status when the activities are complete). This category should represent the minimum number of employees required to implement approved excepted work.
2. **Exempt** - Employees who are fully funded during a lapse in appropriations. Examples of funding sources for exempt employees include available carryover funding, mandatory funding, and advanced collections of reimbursements, Permit Processing Improvement Fund (PPIF), major and minor category rights-of-way, contributed funds, or other program specific funding not tied to the current year’s appropriation. These employees continue working during a lapse in discretionary program funding.

3. **Partially Exempt** - Employees who are funded by multiple funding sources may be partially exempt to the extent their salaries are paid with non-appropriated funding. These employees continue working on exempt activities and then revert to excepted, excepted on call, or furlough status.
4. **Furloughed** - All other employees would be placed on furlough. Furloughed employees are responsible for monitoring OPM and OMB websites regarding when to return to duty.

Lapse Plan Summary Overview

Short-Term Lapse

Short Lapse Plan (1-5 days) Summary Overview	
Estimated time (to nearest half day) required to complete shutdown activities:	0.50
Total number of agency employees expected to be on board before implementation of the plan:	9,250
Total number of agency employees expected to be furloughed under the plan (unduplicated count):	2,400
Total number of employees to be retained under the plan for each of the following categories (may include duplicated counts):	
Compensation is financed by a resource other than annual appropriations:	5,000
Necessary to perform activities expressly authorized by law:	1
Necessary to perform activities necessarily implied by law:	1,249
Necessary to the discharge of the President's constitutional duties and powers:	0
Necessary to protect life and property:	600

Brief summary of significant agency activities that will continue during a lapse:

Employees engaged in the following categories will be excepted and may continue to work on excepted areas of service. Where associated fees are collected for processing, employees may be classified as exempt:

- Law Enforcement and Border Operations
- Emergency Response

- Management of wild horse and burro holding facilities
- Inspections and enforcement for oil and gas and logging operations
- Permitting activities such as Oil and Gas, Transmission and related Rights-of-way, where fees collected for processing activities are available for use, personnel will be classified as “Exempt”
- Activities necessary to protect life and property that are not otherwise exempted
- Necessary functions to oversee or support excepted activities, including budget, procurement, communications, timekeeping, and associated finance, acquisition, and information technology (IT) services
- In order to protect human life and federal property and address the National Energy Emergency, BLM staff responsible for processing oil & gas permits / leases, coal energy leases, and other energy and mineral resources necessary for energy production will be excepted or excepted on-call, to the extent such plans are necessary to protect human life and federal property. Otherwise these activities may be considered exempt where associated fees are accepted.
- Budget planning and preparation for FY 2027.

Fire management staff is designated as exempt based upon the availability of carryover balances in the Wildland Fire Management account. This exempt category includes personnel performing wildfire preparedness, suppression, post-fire response, fuels management, firefighter recruiting, hiring and training. This number is estimated at 3,300 personnel. Once these WFM account carryover balances are exhausted, a reduced number of fire personnel (estimate of 1,000) would continue to work on necessary preparedness and suppression activities for purposes of protecting life and property, as well as assisting with emergency services, and they would become designated as excepted personnel.

Responsibilities of fire management staff include initial attack and extended attack suppression activities on public lands and lands for which BLM has initial attack responsibilities through agreements; post fire response to prevent land degradation and damage to communities; fuels reduction activities to prevent catastrophic fire; procurement of critical firefighting aerial and ground based assets; and recruitment, training and hiring of firefighters. As outlined in the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, the safety of firefighters and the public is the first priority. The consequences of ensuring firefighter and public safety and welfare dictate the appropriate response to wildfire, and thus, the continuation of necessary preparedness and suppression activities (as described below) using excepted personnel once WFM account carryover balances are exhausted.

BLM states and districts will retain as necessary, depending upon the local conditions, fire personnel sufficient for initial attack capability. Additionally, this will include necessary dispatch personnel, the minimum overhead personnel and administrative staff to oversee suppression activities and coordinate supplementation of suppression staff as needed. BLM’s National Fire and Aviation office will ensure adequate personnel are available to support any ongoing needs of the states and districts.

Lead timekeepers will be available on an excepted, on-call basis to assist non-furloughed supervisors and managers so that hours are tracked correctly in the time and attendance system as exempt, excepted, or furloughed. This helps ensure employees are correctly paid during and after shutdown.

Brief summary of significant agency activities that will cease during a lapse:

Day-to-Day non-critical activities for the Bureau of Land Management.

Visitor Management: BLM will evaluate and keep open as many public lands and public facilities as possible. Additionally, BLM will continue operations at visitor sites where fees are collected. The operation of each visitor center must be evaluated on a site-specific basis and any contractual requirements.

Visitor services including trash collection and toilet cleaning will generally continue at recreation fee sites authorized under the Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act while funds are available, but may not be available at all locations. BLM land will remain accessible to the public and efforts will be made to post signs, as appropriate, to indicate where services are or are not available.

Special Recreation Permit Authorizations and Concession/Commercial Recreation Leases

Commercial, competitive, and group authorization for events and activities: Leases and special recreation permits can continue operations as long as they do not need BLM field monitoring or regulatory oversight in the short term. No new special recreation permits will be issued. Certain events operating under approved special recreation permits with a cost-recovery provision may continue. If BLM staff support for the event is required, those employees may temporarily be placed on the exempt list for the duration of the event. Local BLM offices will notify permit holders of any changes.

Individual Special Recreation in Special Areas: Use of permitted areas may continue, however, only exempted maintenance or other services will be provided by the BLM. Any entry onto BLM land is at the visitor's own risk.

Volunteers: Volunteer activities will be discontinued during the shutdown and the normal protections and liability coverages will be suspended, except as determined on a site-specific basis. Volunteers must follow the same restrictions as BLM employees. This includes not accessing closed Federal buildings and not using any Federal equipment or property, such as vehicles, computers, mobile phones, or maintenance equipment. Individuals or groups wishing to volunteer for BLM partners must sign up directly with the partner organization. The volunteer(s) must be covered by insurance and human resource policies of that partner organization.

Campgrounds and Other Recreation Sites: Campgrounds, boat ramps, and other recreation sites will be open, however, at some facilities the full range of services may not be available including restrooms and water systems. In cases where funds are not available to maintain such services, signs will be posted but visitors may remain at these sites at their own risk.

Recreation.gov: A lapse in funding may impact reservations and travel plans. If customers have an existing reservation during this lapse of funding period, and the location is not fully staffed, the reservation may not be honored. We recommend customers contact the local facility to determine if the facility is open or closed. Please consider that if you do make a reservation for the near future and the lapse in funding is not resolved by the arrival date, your reservation may not be honored, or others may have occupied the site. Refunds will be considered and processed after the lapse in funding resolves and the Federal Government opens.

Charge Card

The purchase, travel, fleet, and integrated cards, and cardless products, will all continue to operate in compliance with current DOI policy and guidance for use and approvals. Servicing banks will continue to provide service in accordance with the GSA SmartPay Master Contract. Government Charge Cards may only be used to support excepted or exempted functions

Cardholders should pay particular attention to “automatic” payments they have established with vendors using their purchase cards. To prevent purchases that are not permitted under a shutdown from occurring, A/OPCs and cardholders may need to review these scheduled payments and take action to halt them, if appropriate.

Real Property

- All real property owned or leased by a bureau will not be available for use through the furlough unless utilized by an excepted or exempted employee or unless covered by the partner reimbursable agreement exception below.
- All expenses for fuel, utilities, supplies, etc., must be kept to the minimum required to perform excepted work.
- Actions should be taken to keep utility costs to a minimum during shutdown period. Utilities, such as heating, should be maintained at a minimum to prevent property damage (such as frozen pipes).
- Advise employees and, as applicable, the lessor to secure the premises and power down systems (such as HVAC) and lighting as per a federal holiday. Computers and other electronic items should be locked in a secure area.
- In locations where BLM shares space with non-federal partners and BLM bears the costs for the space, partners will be prohibited from entering and using the office during the shutdown unless necessary to support an exempt or excepted activity. Partners will not be able to use/access any BLM equipment, files, and other property unless stated otherwise from their bureau point of contact/Contracting Officer Representative (COR).
- In locations where the BLM shares space with non-federal partners and the partners space is segregated and separate from DOI space and the partners are paying all costs through a reimbursable agreement with the BLM, their operations may continue. In this situation, the partners will still be prohibited from accessing and using federal files, computers, other equipment, etc. All BLM equipment, files, property and any segregated and/or separate space will be secured and locked for the duration of the shutdown unless stated otherwise by the Plan Administrator.
- In locations where BLM leases space, BLM must notify the lessor about a lapse in funding and reduce support services such as janitorial service (unless there are excepted employees in the building) and ensure trash is removed before lapse begins. Leases will not be terminated in the event of shutdown; however, actions must be taken to secure real and personal property and conserve energy.

Non-fully Serviced Leases

- In some instances, BLM is the lessor for co-location agreements with other federal agencies. Measures should be taken to ensure janitorial services are available in offices where janitorial services are provided directly by the BLM rather than through a third-party lessor.
- Contact utility services to prevent, if possible, the suspension of utility services during the lapse of appropriation.

Personal Property

- All personal property (vehicles, survey equipment, copiers, computers, etc.) owned or leased by BLM will not be available for use through the shutdown unless utilized by an excepted or exempted employee while performing excepted or exempted activities.
- Partners are prohibited from access to or use of BLM equipment, files, and other property. All BLM equipment, files, space, and property (including segregated and separate space) will be secured and locked, for the duration of the shutdown.
- The use of vehicles by non-federal partners or other non-excepted personnel is prohibited.
- Fleet cards will only be available for excepted activities during the shutdown.
- Fleet vehicles should be parked and equipment secured at the designated garage(s) or authorized location(s) to prevent theft and damage, unless required for excepted functions.

Travel

Generally, all BLM employees in travel status or on detail in another location must return to official duty stations as soon as possible once notified to begin shutdown activities. Employee change of duty station actions may be delayed, depending upon the individual circumstances.

Financial Management and Budget

The BLM Budget Office will centrally manage the financial process for excepted and exempt activities where obligations and payments must occur.

- The Budget Office will monitor and report all carryover obligations by fund/sub-activity to leadership daily.
- The Budget Office will receive and maintain a copy of the Lapse of Appropriations Employee List and Data Call. This employee roster is provided by HR and BLM leadership identifying Exempt/Excepted/On-Call Employees. The Budget Office will identify any changes to leadership on the number of excepted and exempted employees.
- The Funds Control team will provide to BLM Leadership the FBMS detailed labor report on Exempt/Excepted/On-Call employees.
- The BLM Chief Financial Officer will decide which carryover sub-activities are appropriate to fund labor obligations during the shutdown.
- The Budget Office will monitor the carryover funding actual obligations daily starting from the beginning of the shutdown period.

- The Budget Office will provide the average cost per employee to calculate the estimated labor costs during the lapse.
- The Budget Office will respond to all financial data requests from the Department during the shutdown period.
- The Budget Office will facilitate all shutdown-related data calls during the shutdown.

Long-Term Lapse

Extended Lapse Plan (over 5 days) Summary Overview	
Estimated time (to nearest half day) required to complete shutdown activities:	0.50
Total number of agency employees expected to be on board before implementation of the plan:	9,250
Total number of agency employees expected to be furloughed under the plan (unduplicated count):	2,400
Total number of employees to be retained under the plan for each of the following categories (may include duplicated counts):	
Compensation is financed by a resource other than annual appropriations:	4,000
Necessary to perform activities expressly authorized by law:	1
Necessary to perform activities necessarily implied by law:	1,619
Necessary to the discharge of the President's constitutional duties and powers:	0
Necessary to protect life and property:	1,230

Actions to Resume Orderly Operations

Communications

The BLM has prepared a Plan for continued operations, where appropriate, and an approved shutdown of activities in the event of a lapse in appropriations. These timelines apply across the BLM mission area, however, these timelines are subject to change based on Departmental guidance and expectations that may arise at the time of the shutdown. Bureau specific timelines, instructions, and additional information follows.

The BLM will encourage furloughed employees to sign up for the mass notification tool for updates on operational status and to provide appropriate contact information to supervisory personnel to share

information updates as needed. Employees will also be directed to monitor <http://www.opm.gov> and <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb>. Employees will also receive updates by the DOI Everbridge Emergency Notification System and notifications through supervisory phone tree communications.

Flexibilities Available to Supervisors

If an employee has an issue returning to work, for instance due to leave planned in advance, DOI encourages supervisors to allow employees to use normal leave, such as accrued annual leave, compensatory time, credit hours, etc. Employees should coordinate this approval with their supervisor when notified to return to work.

Resuming Normal Operations

Furloughed employees are expected to monitor public broadcasts and the internet, including but not limited to DOI.gov, for information and public notices relevant to an annual appropriation or a continuing resolution for DOI passed by Congress and signed by the President. Information will be provided to employees through a mass communication tool (Everbridge). Employees are strongly encouraged to input emergency contact information into Employee Express to receive such notifications. Employees will be expected to return to regular duty on the next workday immediately after the end of the lapse of appropriations.

Contractor/recipient employees should not be addressed or directed individually; the CO/GMO will contact the contractor/recipient and notify them when they can resume performance. The contractor/recipient will then notify their employees of required actions and returning status, and then the contractor/recipient employees will return to the BLM office/location if applicable.