

RCRC Report on BLM Law Enforcement Hearing Says Senator Lee Argued Sheriffs May Be Better Equipped for Some Law Enforcement Responsibilities Currently Under the Purview of BLM

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May 12, 2018 - The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining Oversight held a hearing to examine law enforcement practices at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The hearing was chaired by Senator Mike Lee (R-Utah) who serves as Chairman of the Subcommittee.

FLIPMA, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, authorizes the Interior Secretary to maintain a law enforcement body within the BLM to enforce federal law as it relates to public lands and its resources. The Law Enforcement and Investigations (LEI) office within the U.S. Department of Agriculture conducts wildland fire investigations, resource protection operations, and marijuana seizures on federal forest land.

Senator Lee argued throughout the hearing that BLM's law enforcement operations have exceeded their jurisdictional mandate at the expense of local residents. Senator Lee specifically pointed to the conduct of BLM special agents during "Operation Cerberus" in which BLM special agents used tactical gear and sniper rifles to forcibly administer a search warrant and arrest Utah residents on private property. Senator Lee cited this incident, as well as BLM's aggressive traffic enforcement operation, to suggest the BLM's law enforcement practice has strayed from its mission of protecting public land.

Senator Lee expressed his support for the Local Law Enforcement for Local Lands Act, a bill proposed by Rep. Chris Stewart (R-Utah), that would replace funding for BLM and USFS law enforcement with grants for county sheriffs to increase local law enforcement capabilities on federal land. County sheriffs were praised as a law enforcement alternative throughout the hearing. Sheriffs are community figures with deep ties to the local counties they serve. Senator Lee argued Sheriffs may be better equipped for some law enforcement responsibilities currently under the purview of BLM.

Steed offered to address these issues by reviewing BLM's law enforcement policies and personnel, and moving the agency's law enforcement headquarters closer to western states where most of its activity takes place. The BLM is also making an effort to cooperate more with local partners and is working with the Western States Sheriffs Association reinforce their partnerships with county sheriff offices.

Source: Rural County Representatives of California

<http://goldrushcam.com/sierrasuntimes/index.php/news/local-news/13872-rcrc-report-on-blm-law-enforcement-hearing-says-senator-lee-argued-sheriffs-may-be-better-equipped-for-some-law-enforcement-responsibilities-currently-under-the-purview-of-blm>