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David Ferriero
Archivist of the United States
National Archives and Records Administration
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Washington, DC 20408

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request.schedule@nara.gov
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NARA (ACRA)
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park MD 20740-6001

Re: Department of the Interior Records Destruction Request #DAA-0048-2015-0003.

Dear Archivist Ferriero:

It has come to my attention that the US Department of Interior (DoI) has submitted to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) a draft *Request for Records Disposition Authority* (DAA-0048-2015-0003) requesting permission to schedule records for disposal going back 50 years as well as dates forward from every agency within the Department, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), National Park Service (NPS), US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), US Geological Survey (USGS), Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and others.¹ These important records touch on a range of critical research subjects including oil and gas leases, mining, dams, forests, marine conservation, endangered species, critical habitats, land acquisition and use, etc. In NARA's appraisal memo, most of these records have been misclassified as "temporary" with the justification that they have "little to no research value."

I object strenuously to such a large-scale disposition of important public records without adequate public input. Further, I urge NARA to reconsider the proposed records retention schedule relating to the disposition of this wide swath of important DoI records.

Specifically, I recommend:

¹ Dept of the Interior: Records Destruction Request. <https://altgov2.org/doi-records-destruction/>

1. That NARA deny the proposed change of “disposition authority” from individual bureaus (USGS, BLM, BOER etc) to the office of the Secretary of Interior. While consolidation might correct the inefficiencies that DoI asserts, it could also have two significantly deleterious side-effects. First, it would give more control of records retention decisions to the office of a cabinet-level political appointee, making too easy the overlay of political concerns on records retention across the entire agency going forward. Second, it could make it more difficult for those Bureau staff who have most familiarity with the records to have direct and informed engagement in records classification and records retention decision-making.
2. That additional time be allocated so that researchers and the public can have more time to identify those records that have long-term research value. Examples of such records include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Items in the proposed DoI crosswalk document that contain important observational data that can’t ever be replaced or recreated. These include *Endangered Species Recovery Plan Files and Wildlife Data, Fish & Wildlife Surveys, Critical Habitat Designation, and Revocation Case Files, Energy & Minerals Accounting, Compliance, and Administration Records Federal Files, Energy & Minerals Application Case Files, Resources Analysis and Evaluation, Land Use Planning Materials for Land Use Activities, Special Land Use Permit Case Files, and Land Title, Operations and Realty, and Water Project Contracts, Engineering, and Water Quality* – Proposed Items 0048-2015-0003-0001, 0004, 0006, 0007, 0009, 0010, 0011, 0012*, 0013, 0014, 0015, 0019*, 0022, 0023*².
 - b. Records referencing the lawsuit *Cobell v. Salazar*, the largest class-action lawsuit in history against the US government over Indian trust funds, which were misfiled under Energy & Minerals rather than BIA and labeled “temporary.”

In addition, to increase the accuracy of the process of identifying records that have long-term value to the public and researchers, I recommend that NARA implement new ways to encourage public participation in the process and new ways to make participation easier. I would hope that NARA would consider using technological tools such as RSS and APIs that would allow the public to more easily search, browse, and discover announcements, documents, and the progress of the departmental scheduling process.

As you know, this large and complex scheduling request by the DoI has brought the attention of the public both to this schedule and to the records scheduling process in general. This offers an excellent opportunity for NARA to re-evaluate its procedures and policies and align them to wider government efforts and initiatives in government transparency, FOIA, open- and big data, and data management. I recommend that re-evaluation and re-alignment.

NARA’s work in preserving records of the US government is critical to the exercise of good government and the protection of the historical record. NARA’s appraisal policy³ notes that its

² Only 3 out of 416 proposed items pertaining to data are listed as “permanent” in the draft DoI crosswalk: 0012 Lease Case History Files (energy & minerals), 0019 (Land use planning management plans and reports), and 0023 (Historic water and power projects). <https://records-express.blogs.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DRS-Mission-Bucket-2-2-Crosswalk-Full-Descriptions.pdf>

³ NARA, *Strategic Directions: Appraisal Policy*. <https://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/initiatives/appraisal.html>

mission is to ensure “for the Citizen and the Public Servant, for the President and the Congress and the Courts ready access to essential evidence.” These DoI records comprise some of the the very core essential evidence of the National experience. The inadvertent or deliberate disposal of critical records will hamper environmental and scientific research as well as the development and the creation of public policy both now and in the future. Robust public participation is essential to avoid that problem and the current public interest in these records offers NARA an opportunity to solicit additional public participation in these critical decisions. Therefore, I request that NARA delay the approval of the DoI schedule to allow more time for public examination of and comment on this complex proposal and to reevaluate these records in line with public interest and comments and its own appraisal policy and with an eye toward potential research value.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours truly,

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