

SES CDP: Cultural Change

I'm thinking about whether I've seen the culture change of the Department of the Interior since I started working here in 1986, and the answer is no and yes. First I will say no because there are some really good fundamentals in the Department of the Interior in terms of our values as a community, and I will say that I don't see these certain aspects in other agencies that I'm familiar with, and the first of these, and the most important I would say, is the retention. We have people that I've worked with now who have been here their entire career. There's plenty of diversity in the Department of the Interior with 70,000 people. Many bureaus, land managing bureaus, bureaus that manage human issues such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and also the Territories and International Affairs, so this agency, the Department of the Interior, has so much to offer. People can spend their entire careers here, 30, 40, 50 years, and feel like they've not run out of things to learn and challenges to meet, so I would say that that is something I value very highly, the fact that I now know people as good friends and colleagues that I've worked with for this long. Not very many people can say that about their workplace anymore. It's a very mobile society, and even though we have people who live all over the United States and move, we feel like we are a good community in the Department of the Interior. I'll share a little story that a former director of the Fish and Wildlife Service shared, and that was he said he told his kids when they were growing up that if they ever had a flat tire or got into some kind of trouble anywhere they should get a phone book, get the yellow pages and find the nearest refuge and refuge manager and they'd be in good hands to call that person, and that's something I've already passed on to my son, and it's true I

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believe of any bureau in the Department of the Interior. It's just a good community of people.

One of the things I learned when I came over here is that the culture of this organization is different and it's been changing, and when I came over it was in the midst of change as the organization was moving toward a three-region structure and desired to have integrated science, and that's been challenging for an organization that is primarily based on four disciplines, hydrology, biology, geology, and geography, and pretty much operated as four distinct organizations, four distinct business lines, and so the effort had begun to try to move towards one bureau with all the scientists working as one science agency. When I came, that was the situation, and I was asked to try to help look at expanding that effort and to try to look at our organizational structure and alignment so that we could increase the efforts at science integration and to develop new partnerships on the landscape and also to try to make the science that we were working on more aligned with the needs of the resource management agencies like BLM and Fish and Wildlife Service and the Parks Service, BIA, etc. So that was a major challenge, and we undertook a planning effort, it took several years, and we came up with a number of organizational options in which we proposed to implement or to consider for implementation, and eventually we selected one that had continued the three-region structure with nine sub-regional areas underneath that region, again, with the express purpose of trying to enhance the science integration efforts and to work much closer with our stakeholders and partners on

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the landscape and to try to ensure that our science plans and projects were relevant to the resource management agencies. As a part of that process, I had to brief the department to get their approval, brief the OMB, brief the congressional appropriation staff who are always interested anytime you want to make some major organizational changes. The department was interested in the re-deployment of executive resources for which they control, so there were a lot of bases to be touched, and again, that's a reflection of the governance process that new political leaderships would not be sensitive to. It's very easy to say I want to reorganize, I want to restructure, but how to do that is very time consuming and a lot of bases have to be touched and concurrence on the part of management overseers to ensure that what we're doing is consistent with their sense of honoring the rules and compliance with the rules as well as policies that they may have. So the end result was that it was approved and we've implemented it. We're under that new structure for about two years, and one of the lessons that you learned from that process is that what you have on paper and what you try to implement sometimes are two different things in that what is particularly critical is that the business processes that you have in place are adjusted to support the new alignment, and if you just change the boxes and the organizational arrangement but you don't change the business practices then you're gonna be less than successful in trying to accomplish the objectives for which you established in setting up the new structure. So the point is that it's something that's a constant effort that has to be reinforced every day in terms of how you do business and to make sure that new reporting lines and new

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authorities are honored in how you're doing business to help those who are still under the old structure thinking to transition to the new structure and to reinforce that new structure with how business is conducted.