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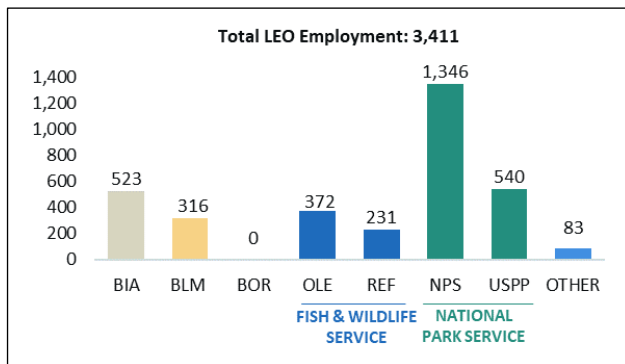
Department of the Interior Law Enforcement Programs

Overview

The Department of the Interior (DOI) employs law enforcement officers (LEOs) for a variety of purposes including fostering public safety, protecting natural and cultural resources, and enforcing federal laws and regulations. Law enforcement on lands administered by DOI and its bureaus is of perennial interest to Congress. Issues of focus relate to funding, jurisdictional disputes between federal and nonfederal law enforcement agencies, use of body cameras, and more recent concerns around excessive force and police-community relations, among others.

As of December 2023, DOI employed roughly 3,400 LEOs. DOI's law enforcement contingent is the fourth largest among executive branch departments, after the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Veterans Affairs. The majority of DOI LEOs are assigned to six organizational units within four DOI bureaus (see **Figure 1**). These bureaus/units are the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA); Bureau of Land Management (BLM); Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS's) Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) and Division of Refuge Law Enforcement (REF); National Park Service (NPS); and U.S. Park Police (USPP) within NPS. A seventh unit in the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) was dissolved in 2017. In addition, several DOI offices and programs employ LEOs for a variety of duties.

Figure 1. DOI Law Enforcement Employment
(as of December 2023)



Source: Totals provided to CRS on December 20, 2023, by DOI.

Notes: BIA = Bureau of Indian Affairs; BLM = Bureau of Land Management; BOR = Bureau of Reclamation; OLE = Fish and Wildlife Service – Office of Law Enforcement; REF = Fish and Wildlife Service – Division of Refuge Law Enforcement; NPS = National Park Service; USPP = U.S. Park Police. “Other” reflects law enforcement officer employment figures for the Office of Inspector General and other DOI offices, including for the Office of Law Enforcement and Security, the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, and the Office of Aviation Services. All totals reflect “on-board employment” figures.

DOI defines *law enforcement officer* as a “person who has entered the Federal service through established selection criteria, has received professional training according to published standards, and has been commissioned or sworn to perform law enforcement duties” (*DOI Departmental Manual* Part 446 Ch. 1). Generally, LEOs include employees who are authorized to carry firearms, execute and serve warrants, search for and seize evidence, make arrests, and perform such duties as authorized by law. The category broadly includes uniformed police officers, investigative agents, correctional officers, and various other positions within DOI. Since 2001, DOI's Office of Law Enforcement and Security (OLES) has provided direction, oversight, and coordination across DOI's various law enforcement units (Secretarial Order No. 3234, *Enhanced Coordination of Department of the Interior Law Enforcement and Security*).

The specific duties of DOI LEOs can vary considerably based on the type (e.g., investigative agent vs. correctional officer), seniority (supervisory vs. nonsupervisory), and geographic location of the position. For example, in the American Southwest, officers may deal with unauthorized recreational off-highway vehicle users and archaeological resource crimes, whereas LEOs working in urbanized areas may be responsible for managing special events and political demonstrations, as well as performing other law enforcement duties.

The following sections provide a brief overview of DOI law enforcement units, their enforcement activities, and the authority under which they operate. The sections also briefly discuss additional law enforcement support for DOI and its bureaus.

Bureau of Indian Affairs

Jurisdiction over offenses or crimes committed on tribal lands may lie with federal, state, or tribal agencies, depending on the offense, the location of the offense, and whether the offender or victim is an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe. Although most police departments and detention centers on tribal lands are administered by tribes under their sovereign authorities, some are operated and administered by the BIA, largely under the authority of the Indian Law Enforcement Reform Act (25 U.S.C. §§2801-2809). As of 2018 (the last year for which data are available), roughly 9% of all police departments and 25% of detention centers on tribal lands were administered by the BIA (Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Census of Tribal Law Enforcement*, 2019). Staff in BIA-administered police departments and jails are considered federal employees rather than tribal employees. As of December 2023, BIA employed 166 uniformed *police officers*, 195 *special agents*, and 162 *correctional officers*, for 523 total LEOs.

Bureau of Land Management

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. §§1701 et seq.), the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to stand up a law enforcement body to enforce federal laws and regulations with respect to lands and resources under BLM’s jurisdiction. As of December 2023, BLM employed 241 law enforcement *rangers* and 75 *special agents* for a total of 316 LEOs. BLM rangers typically are responsible for the enforcement of laws and regulations governing BLM lands and resources. Special agents typically are plainclothes criminal investigators who plan and conduct investigations concerning possible violations on BLM lands.

Bureau of Reclamation

In 2001, Congress provided the Secretary of the Interior with the authority to use law enforcement personnel to provide for the security of dams, facilities, and resources under BOR’s jurisdiction (43 U.S.C. §373b). Under this authority, BOR uses other federal, state, or local LEOs via contract or cooperative agreement to oversee and conduct law enforcement activities. The only site that employed a full-time law enforcement unit administered directly by BOR was the Hoover Dam office; known as the Hoover Dam Police Department, the unit was established in the early 1930s and dissolved in 2017. As of December 2023, BOR no longer operates a law enforcement unit. The agency reported employing 90 *security guard* staff at critical infrastructures around the country, referred to as the Security Response Force; however, DOI does not categorize this job series as LEOs.

Fish and Wildlife Service

FWS’s law enforcement authority derives from numerous laws that pertain to federal wildlife and implement certain international treaties. Two distinct law enforcement units are responsible for enforcing such federal wildlife laws: the Office of Law Enforcement and the Division of Refuge Law Enforcement.

Office of Law Enforcement

The OLE is responsible for investigations and wildlife inspection across the country. Federal law enforcement of wildlife crime originated with the Lacey Act of 1900 (16 U.S.C. §§3371-3378 and 18 U.S.C. §§42-43) but has since expanded to include various laws and treaties. As of December 2023, OLE employed 222 *special agents* and 150 *inspectors*, for a total of 372 LEOs. Generally, special agents are investigators who aim to solve wildlife crimes, such as illegal wildlife trafficking. Wildlife inspectors oversee wildlife transiting through U.S. ports and identify and intercept illegally imported or exported wildlife.

Division of Refuge Law Enforcement

The REF is responsible for enforcing laws on National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) lands. This authority is primarily derived from the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. §668dd(g)). As of December 2023, FWS employed 231 uniformed officers, generally referred to as *federal wildlife officers*, on NWRS lands.

National Park Service

NPS employees have long had a role in protecting national parklands and enforcing agency regulations, but they did not have express permission to “maintain law and order and to protect individuals and property within [National Park] System units” until 1976, when Congress passed the General Authorities Act (54 U.S.C. §102701). As of December 2023, NPS employed 33 *special agents*, who oversee criminal investigations as part of the agency’s Investigative Services Branch, and 1,264 *park rangers*, who are responsible for everyday law enforcement on NPS lands. Although the title *park ranger* generally refers to a broad range of employee positions within NPS, the ranger figures here reflect only those employees specifically authorized to carry out law enforcement duties. NPS also uses seasonal rangers who conduct similar duties as permanent rangers, usually for a period of several months. As of December 2023, NPS employed 49 seasonal LEOs, for a total of 1,346 LEOs. The total may be higher during the summer months, when seasonal LEO employment is at its peak. For example, in July 2022, NPS reported having 214 seasonal LEOs on staff.

U.S. Park Police

The USPP is one of the oldest uniformed federal law enforcement units; its origins date to the late 1700s, when its LEOs were referred to as *watchmen* and charged with safeguarding public buildings in the nation’s capital. Congress formally established the USPP in 1919 (41 Stat. 364) and transferred the USPP to NPS administration in 1924 (43 Stat. 175). The USPP primarily oversees law enforcement on national parklands in Washington, DC; New York City; and San Francisco. However, USPP jurisdiction generally extends to all NPS parklands nationwide. As of December 2023, USPP employed 540 uniformed *officers*.

Additional DOI Law Enforcement

Beyond these law enforcement units, DOI reported 83 employees in various law enforcement positions across several offices and programs (**Figure 1** note). DOI’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) employed the majority of these LEOs. The OIG is vested with law enforcement authority pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (5 U.S.C. §6(e)(3)). According to DOI, in December 2023, the OIG employed 67 agents responsible for investigating DOI programs and operations. LEOs employed by DOI’s OIG and other departmental offices generally are not considered a separate LEO unit within DOI.

Generally, DOI agencies can designate federal law enforcement personnel to act in areas within their jurisdiction. This includes shared or supplemental LEO support between DOI agencies, as well as with other federal agencies with appropriate authority. Agencies also regularly cooperate and contract with local sheriff’s offices, as well as state and tribal authorities, to provide law enforcement on federal lands and areas within agency responsibility or control. Such agreements may allow certain officers to be cross-deputized to expand jurisdiction and capacity for federal and nonfederal authorities.

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