CREW

CITIZENS FOR
RESPONSIBILITY &
ETHICS IN WASHINGTON

November 10, 2026

The Honorable Bradford P. Wilson
Archivist of the United States
National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD 20740-6001

Ms. Laura Besong
Chief Records Officer
National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD 20740-6001

Re: Notice of Potential Removal or Destruction of Federal Records by Department of the Interior

Dear Archivist Wilson and Ms. Besong:

We write to alert you of the potential destruction of federal records and circumvention of established agency programs of records management by the U.S. Department of the Interior ("Interior"), its components, and its staff. As detailed below, we request the National Archives and Records Administration ("NARA") immediately investigate and take appropriate remedial action in response to any failure by Interior or its staff to preserve federal records.

Please confirm by November 13, 2026 in writing that NARA and Interior have commenced the actions requested below.

On November 10, 2026, CNN reported that multiple whistleblowers have approached the House Committee on Natural Resources in recent weeks to raise concerns that Interior is disposing of records in anticipation of congressional scrutiny.[1] According to congressional

[1] Sunlen Serfaty & Annie Grayer, *First on CNN: Whistleblowers tell Democrats documents linked to Trump's construction projects are being destroyed*, CNN (Nov. 10, 2026), https://www.cnn.com/2026/11/10/politics/trump-building-investigation-democrats-house-natural-resources; Press Release, Rep. Jared Huffman, Huffman Puts Trump Admin, Corporate Donors on Notice to Preserve Records (Nov. 9, 2026), https://huffman.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/huffman-puts-trump-admin-corporate-donors-on-notice-to-preserve-records

sources, the whistleblowers warned that key paperwork related to President Trump's construction projects around Washington has already been destroyed.[2] Interior, whose components include the National Park Service ("NPS") and the Bureau of Land Management ("BLM"), oversees much of the national parkland on which those projects would be built.[3]

The reported destruction comes as the administration is reportedly accelerating those projects before the new Congress is seated. According to CNN, the triumphal arch, a fencing project at Lafayette Square, the East Potomac Golf Links, and the Tidal Basin Development Concept plan, which includes the Garden of American Heroes, are all expected to advance over the next 60 days, with some going before federal agencies for approval and others moving through historic preservation review.[4]

This is not the first report of records destruction at Interior. On August 7, 2026, Politico reported that three staffers with firsthand knowledge said Interior officials have routinely shredded official documents and used disappearing Signal messages, even for routine scheduling matters, to avoid preserving communications as the FRA requires.[5] "They're terrified of written records," one former official said.[6] That reporting prompted inquiries from members of both chambers of Congress, including an August 19, 2026 letter from Senators Martin Heinrich and Ron Wyden asking Secretary Burgum whether he had directed, or was aware of, the destruction or concealment of federal records.[7]

The repeated reports of records destruction at Interior, coupled with whistleblower accounts that records are now being destroyed in anticipation of oversight, create an urgent need for NARA to act before any more records are lost. Interior's apparent destruction of federal records appears to violate its statutory record keeping requirements.

The Federal Records Act ("FRA") imposes on Interior the obligation to "make and preserve records containing adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions" of the agency. 44 U.S.C. § 3101. Each agency must establish and maintain "an active, continuing program" for the management of federal records, including "effective controls over the creation and over the maintenance and use of records." *Id.* § 3102. Further, the FRA "strictly limits the circumstances under which records can be removed from federal custody or destroyed."[8]

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[2] *Id.*
[3] *Id.*
[4] *Id.*
[5] *Id.*
[6] *Id.*
[7] Press Release, Heinrich, Wyden Demand Accountability From DOI Following Report that Agency Officials Destroyed Official Records (Aug. 19, 2026), https://www.energy.senate.gov/press/dem/heinrich-wyden-demand-accountability-from-doi-following-report-that-agency-officials-destroyed-official-records/.
[8] *Jud. Watch, Inc. v. Kerry*, 844 F.3d 952, 953 (D.C. Cir. 2016) (citing 44 U.S.C. § 3105(1)).

NARA regulations outline that "[t]he penalties for the unlawful or accidental removal, defacing, alteration, or destruction of Federal records or the attempt to do so, include a fine, imprisonment, or both." 36 C.F.R. § 1230.12 (citing 18 U.S.C. §§ 641, 2071).

NARA regulations define "unlawful or accidental destruction" to include "disposal of a record subject to a FOIA request, litigation hold, or any other hold requirement to retain the records." *Id.* § 1230.3(b). And the Secretary of the Interior has a non-discretionary duty to "[p]revent the unlawful or accidental removal, defacing, alteration, or destruction of records." *Id.* § 1230.10(a).

The FRA further imposes on "[t]he head of each Federal agency" the obligation to "notify the Archivist of any actual, impending, or threatened unlawful removal, defacing, alteration, corruption, deletion, erasure, or other destruction of records in the custody of the agency" and "with the assistance of the Archivist" to "initiate action through the Attorney General for the recovery of [those] records." 44 U.S.C. § 3106(a). Absent such action by the Secretary of the Interior, the FRA requires NARA itself to "request the Attorney General to initiate such an action, and shall notify the Congress when such a request has been made." *Id.* § 3106(b).

Federal law thus requires the preservation of federal records and imposes certain mandatory obligations on NARA to facilitate such preservation. *See, e.g.*, 44 U.S.C. §§ 3106, 2905(a); 36 C.F.R. §§ 1230.14, 1230.16. NARA's own regulations provide that "[u]pon receiving any credible information that records are at risk of actual, impending, or threatened damage, alienation, or unauthorized destruction, NARA will contact the agency." 36 C.F.R. § 1230.16. Accounts from multiple whistleblowers to a congressional committee, following earlier accounts from three Interior staffers, are credible information that records are at risk.

We request that NARA take appropriate action, including instructing Interior and its components, including NPS and BLM, to immediately cease the destruction of records; manage and preserve all federal records, including all records relating to the President's construction projects in and around Washington; and report any unlawful removal, alteration, or destruction of records to NARA. To the extent federal records have already been destroyed or removed, NARA and Interior must take all steps necessary to recover the records, including initiating enforcement actions through the Department of Justice.

Please confirm by **November 13, 2026** in writing that NARA and the agencies have commenced the requested actions. Please direct any communications about this matter to Kayvan Farchadi at [redacted]

Sincerely,

Kayvan Farchadi

Kayvan Farchadi
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington

cc: The Honorable Doug Burgum, Secretary of the Interior, U.S. Department of the Interior; Caryl N. Brzymialkiewicz, Deputy Inspector General Performing the Duties of the Inspector General, U.S. Department of the Interior