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May 28, 2010

Interim Director Named for Drilling Agency

By **JOHN M. BRODER**

Interior Secretary [Ken Salazar](#) on Friday named Bob Abbey, director of the department's [Bureau of Land Management](#), as interim director of the [Minerals Management Service](#), the scandal-ridden agency responsible for oversight of [offshore drilling](#).

Mr. Abbey, a longtime state and federal lands official, takes over from S. Elizabeth Birnbaum, [who resigned](#) Thursday after only 11 months on the job.

Mr. Abbey will run the agency as it is being dismantled over the next several months. Mr. Salazar announced last week that he intended to break it into three parts to handle leasing and [oil](#) extraction, safety and environmental oversight, and revenue collection.

Currently all those functions are combined, leading to numerous conflicts of interest, with the same group of officials responsible for collecting fees from oil drilling on public lands and offshore while also policing their operations.

Mr. Obama has said the agency is plagued by corruption and excessive coziness with industry and has pledged to reform it.

As director of the Bureau of Land Management, Mr. Abbey has been responsible for oil, gas and mineral extraction from public lands. He now adds offshore operations to his portfolio. He served as the bureau's director in Nevada during the Clinton administration. He left government in 2005 to work for a consulting firm in Las Vegas that dealt with lands and mining issues in the West before returning to the [Interior Department](#) last year.

“Bob Abbey’s recent leadership on onshore energy reforms is exactly the kind of experience we need as we continue to reform and begin to restructure M.M.S.,” Mr. Salazar said in a statement. “I appreciate Bob’s willingness to help tackle this crisis in the gulf.”

He said that Mike Poole, the deputy director of the land management bureau, would temporarily take charge of the agency.