

Bureau of Land Management
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BLM Consults Resource Advisory Councils to Strengthen Socio-Economic Analysis

The Bureau of Land Management announced today it will seek the views of Resource Advisory Council (RAC) members as part of an assessment of the agency's ability to identify the social and economic effects of its plans and projects. BLM has three councils in the Northwest, based on their geographic jurisdiction: the Eastern Washington RAC, the John Day-Snake RAC, and the Southeast Oregon RAC.

"The BLM makes decisions daily that affect the social and economic well-being of communities and regions, while trying to balance the competing interests of many groups," Director Jim Caswell said. "So it is essential that our managers and staff have access to sound and cost-effective socio-economic information."

A team of economists and sociologists from four Western universities is conducting the assessment. The team will conduct phone interviews with RAC members to get their perspectives on the social and economic effects of BLM's management decisions, and the usefulness of the socio-economic information currently supporting land-use planning and project review. Other activities conducted for this assessment include interviews with a sample of county planners and a phone survey of over 1,200 BLM employees. This information will help shape an action plan for strengthening the BLM's socio-economic capabilities.

Several factors have increased the BLM's need for well-focused and credible socio-economic data and analysis. A growing population across much of the West is one important factor. For example, from 1970 to 2005 Clark County, Nevada, which includes Las Vegas, grew from about 276,000 to 1,710,000 people. Other factors include the rapid pace of energy development, growing diversity of the communities using the lands managed by the BLM, and growing interest by state and local governments in the social and economic consequences of the BLM's resource decisions.

Resource Advisory Council members are appointed by the Secretary of the Interior to advise managers on the BLM's programs. They represent a balance of civic, environmental, and commodity interests, as well as the public at large.

The BLM manages more land – 258 million surface acres – than any other Federal agency. Most of this public land is located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1.8 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, and cultural resources on the public lands.

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