

# FLPMA Turns 30

The Bureau of Land Management also celebrates its 60th birthday.

By Joseph Ross

In the course of a lifetime, turning 30 is a milestone that signifies a new era of maturity, but is not totally without a few aches and pains. The life of a major land-use law follows a similar course. One of the most significant pieces of land management legislation enacted within the 20th Century was the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. It gave a clear mandate to the nation's largest land manager, the Bureau of Land Management, for the management of over 260 million acres of public lands under its jurisdiction. Much of the public domain, originally totaling some 1.8 billion acres, was transferred into private ownership during the course of westward expansion and settlement. Other lands became National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, Forests, military bases, and holdings of other Federal agencies. The remaining acres of our Nation's public domain, called by some "The Last Frontier," were to be used in the National interest and for public benefit.

As settlers moved west, the economic well-being of communities depended upon public lands and resources. Mining, timber, and livestock industries grew. Wildlife attracted hunters and fishermen. Public land policy was dominated by these traditional uses for many years. In 1812, Congress established the General Land Office (GLO) in the Treasury Department to administer the public lands. The idea had been originally proposed by Alexander Hamilton in 1790. A

Commissioner was charged with responsibility for all public land records, sales, grants, and supervision of local land offices. The GLO delineated the public lands, encouraged settlement, and granted lands for a variety of uses. The Homestead Act of 1862 awarded land to every settler who could farm and live on the tracts, and the Mining Act of 1872 allowed for the exploration and development of valuable mineral deposits.

During the early days of public land management in our country, most officials believed that all public land would eventually pass into private ownership and any money spent on land management would be lost. Conditions on the pub-



Livestock grazing, an important use of the public lands, is central to the livelihood and culture of many local communities. A significant portion of the cattle and sheep produced in the West graze on public rangelands.

---

This article has been peer reviewed.

lic range reached such a state by the 1930s that ranchers demanded action. Intensified livestock grazing management came in 1934 with the Taylor Grazing Act. Management of public lands within grazing districts meant classification, improvement, and conservation of rangeland resources. Despite its regulation of grazing and stabilization of the western livestock industry, the Act was limited in scope because it focused on a single constituency—the domestic livestock operator.

In 1946, a major reorganization took place within the Department of the Interior. The General Land Office and the Grazing Service were combined and renamed “The Bureau of Land Management.” The 1950s saw new users competing for public land resources. Consequently, the Bureau’s responsibilities and programs became much broader and more complex. Thousands of public land laws had been enacted since the American Revolution. A 1964 report of the Public Land Law Review Commission listed 2,669 public land laws. Imagine the headaches that this maze created for land managers trying to be responsive to the needs of the American public. BLM career employees referred to this policy direction as a type of crossword puzzle, and the agency badly needed a new legislated policy for public land management.

On the first day of 1970, President Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), acknowledging that federal actions had potential environmental impacts and requiring that they be analyzed before decisions were made. Shortly thereafter, Congress also passed legislation to protect air and water quality, endangered species, cultural resources, wild horses and burros. Additionally, public involvement, advisory boards, and litigation were prominent in the 1970s. Under Presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter, Congress considered creating a Department of the Environment and Natural Resources. Both efforts failed, but Nixon was successful in creating the Environmental Protection Agency in 1972. A year later, the US was undergoing a major energy crisis and concern elevated for America’s energy needs and future.

After BLM’s creation in 1946, successive Presidents had called for public land law reform. In 1976, Congress responded with FLPMA, directing that America’s public lands should be retained in Federal ownership. (An exception provided for the disposal of individual tracts when in the public interest.) The retention policy reversed the disposal policy that dated back to the earliest days of our country. Changing public attitudes, priorities, and concern for environmental values and open space had slowly replaced the concern for settlement to “lay claim” for US interests, development and increased production. Americans realized that BLM-administered public lands would best serve the public interest in public ownership.

FLPMA formally recognized what BLM had been doing on an interim basis for many years—managing the public lands under principles of multiple use and sustained yield. But FLPMA also granted BLM new authorities and responsibilities, prescribed specific management techniques

and designated BLM’s California Desert Conservation Area. With the passing of FLPMA, BLM would finally get its mission, but FLPMA didn’t come easy.

By August 1976, a comprehensive act relating to public land management had been passed by each house of Congress. The Senate disagreed to House amendments and requested a conference. The House called the Act the “Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976,” while the Senate called it the “National Resource Lands Management Act.” Several difficult issues almost killed the bill. On September 22, Senator Metcalf of Montana offered a compromise, proposing that grazing fee formula provisions would be deleted, all grazing leases would be for 10 years, grazing advisory board functions would be limited to making recommendations on expenditure of range improvement funds, and the Senate language for mining claims would be applicable only to claims filed after enactment of the Act. Substitute compromises were subsequently offered but rejected. A compromise was finally reached at the eleventh hour on September 28, 1976. The conference report was passed by Congress, just hours before its 94th session ended. FLPMA was then signed by the President on October 21, 1976. The Bureau of Land Management was now in the “big leagues.” Major provisions of FLPMA are spelled out in the sidebar.

## Planning

During the 1970s, systematic land use planning was implemented. Management Framework Plans (MFPs) had been prepared for about 85% of BLM lands in the lower 48 states by 1976. Data from resource inventories were considered with economic and social information to develop and compare management alternatives. After holding public meetings, BLM Resource Areas revised, finalized, and implemented the plans. FLPMA required BLM to develop a more comprehensive land use planning system for “developing, displaying, and assessing” management alternatives. The Bureau was also instructed to strengthen its coordination with state and local governments. In 1977, BLM began developing Resource Management Plans (RMPs), prepared in conjunction with Environmental Impact Statements. In 1979, BLM phased in a transition from MFPs to RMPs. Scheduled updates of MFPs were replaced by RMPs.

## Leadership

Since 1971, 10 BLM Directors have served the agency: Burt Silcock, Curt Berklund, Frank Gregg, Robert Burford, Cy Jamison, Jim Baca, Michael Dombeck, Pat Shea, Tom Fry, and Kathleen Clarke. This article will now present some of their insights and perspectives in regard to FLPMA. Their viewpoints are candid recollections and memories that recall social, political, and economic challenges that BLM has faced over the years.

Burt Silcock, a career Bureau employee and Alaska State Director from 1965 to 1971, was called upon by Secretary Walter Hickel to handle critical Alaska issues in the early

## FLPMA's major provisions

**Congressional Review of Land Withdrawals** – FLPMA required BLM to review all existing classifications and withdrawals when preparing new land use plans. FLPMA empowered Congress to review sales of land in excess of 2,500 acres, withdrawals of tracts over 5,000 acres, and decisions on principal uses of lands in areas greater than 100,000 acres.

**Recreation and Public Purposes Act Amendments (R&PP)** – FLPMA amended the R&PP Act to increase the land that BLM could sell or lease to state and local governments, and it required public participation in all decisions to dispose of lands under the act.

**Law Enforcement** – FLPMA authorized BLM to hire uniformed rangers in the California Desert, but required the Bureau to rely on local officials as much as possible through cooperative agreements with local enforcement agencies.

**Finance and Budget** – FLPMA provided BLM with budget authorities to make its work more efficient. FLPMA also established BLM's Working Capital Fund. FLPMA allowed BLM to accept contributions and donations for specific activities on BLM lands such as wildlife habitat improvements or recreation developments. FLPMA also allowed BLM to establish service charges for applications and documents.

**Land Exchanges and Acquisitions** – FLPMA provided for cash payments from the government to equalize values of exchanged lands. BLM was given authority for land acquisition under its land use plans but limited the government's power of eminent domain. FLPMA also allowed BLM to use Land and Water Conservation funds to acquire public recreation lands.

**Special Management Areas** – BLM was authorized to identify Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) through its planning process. ACECs were defined as "areas within the public lands where special management attention is required to protect historic, cultural or scenic areas, fish and wildlife resources, or other natural systems or processes."

**Livestock Grazing** – FLPMA authorized a study of grazing fees. To ensure long-term stability and use of BLM-administered lands by the livestock industry, FLPMA authorized 10-year grazing permits and required 2-year notices of cancellation. BLM grazing advisory boards were directed to advise BLM on the development of Allotment Management Plans and the allocation of range improvement funds.

**Wilderness** – BLM was given Wilderness study and management authority previously provided only to the US Forest Service, National Park Service, and US Fish & Wildlife Service. BLM was directed to review the public lands for wilderness potential as set forth in the 1964 Wilderness Act. FLPMA also directed BLM to conduct early wilderness reviews on all lands designated as primitive or natural areas before November 1, 1975.

**Wild Horses and Burros** – FLPMA amended the Wild and Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act to authorize the use of helicopters in horse and burro roundups. Wild horse and burro populations had more than tripled since passage of that act in 1971.

**Minerals Management** – FLPMA modified the formulas for distribution of funds collected under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 and the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970. Persons holding claims under the General Mining Law of 1872 were required to record them with BLM within 10 years. FLPMA authorized loans to state and local governments to relieve social and economic impacts of mineral development and directed the Secretary to develop stipulations that would prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the land.

**Other Provisions** – FLPMA established the California Desert Conservation Area and directed BLM to develop a land allocation plan for the area by 1980. FLPMA repealed the Homestead Act (except in Alaska where it was given a 10-year sunset) and other settlement acts. FLPMA also dictated that future BLM Directors would be appointed by the President, with approval from the Senate.

1970s and to continue his predecessor Boyd Rasmussen's work in obtaining an Organic Act for the Bureau. Silcock stated, "When I became Director, the search for a national land use policy concerning public lands was in full swing." He acknowledged that the challenges BLM faced were signs of a changing nation that was demanding recreational op-

portunities, needing clean sources of energy, and wanting to see improved management of wild horses, wildlife habitat, and livestock grazing.

Dr Curt Berklund, BLM Director from 1973–1977, recalls, "The Bureau had few trusted constituencies. Strong political support was needed to build a record as a profes-



Since the 1960s, BLM has identified and designated millions of acres as special management areas under its multiple-use mandate to recognize unique or threatened resources. Under Burt Silcock, BLM Director from 1971–73, major acreages were set aside in New Mexico, Montana, Idaho, and California. A career BLM employee, Silcock had formerly served as Alaska State Director from 1965–71. Secretary Walter Hickel called upon him to deal with critical Alaska issues, as well as to continue efforts in obtaining an “organic act” for BLM.

ing. Over the years, this effort really paid dividends. We also worked on improving our relationships with the news media. One of the more important tasks was to begin building credibility with Congress.”

One of Berklund’s most notable achievements was to delegate authority and responsibility to the field organization. He wanted to give confidence to field managers and emphasize that they were both in charge of and accountable for their assignments.

“We worked very hard to secure approval of an organic act for the Bureau,” says Berklund. “Trying to administer programs governed by over 3,000 land laws was virtually impossible. The task divided us and did not generate the constituent support we needed. We received special dispensation from the Department and the administration to work out the legislation, because I had chaired the Department’s committee to review the Public Land Law Review Commission’s report and make recommendations for implementation.”

Berklund adds, “Former Secretary Tom Kleppe was instrumental in providing BLM the support we needed to cut the deals and work out the language we felt was required to formulate the legislation. We fought hard on key issues such as wilderness review, law enforcement authority, the California Desert National Conservation Area and administrative provisions needed to streamline our approach to multiple-use management. I personally opposed making the Director a presidential appointee; however, we were able to legislate some level of protection for the career ranks. I established

sional natural resource agency that would manage the programs on-the-ground in the full multiple-use context. One of my desires was to establish a way of building our credibility outside the government and have groups and key individuals we could count on. We went to work with state and county governments through the Western Governors’ Association and the National Association of Counties to help build a constituency among those who were closest to the everyday decisions BLM managers were making.

the organization to implement FLPMA and implementation began while I was still Director. We set up a multi-disciplinary committee of Washington managers and staff and made considerable progress in setting out basic guidelines.”

While final passage of FLPMA was attained under Berklund, it was Director Frank Gregg who set the stage for its implementation. He finalized new mineral leasing policies and oversaw the Bureau’s efforts in securing passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980. Despite passage of the Public Rangelands Improvement Act in 1978, many of the Bureau’s traditional constituents felt BLM had bypassed them in a rush to embrace new public land users.

Originating in Nevada, the Sagebrush Rebellion grew out of opposition to the federal government’s enlarged role in public land management and was based on an argument that the federal lands belonged to the western states. Livestock grazing reductions, environmental laws, and anti-government sentiment fueled the movement that attracted national attention. In 1979, the Nevada legislature passed a resolution calling for state ownership of BLM public lands. Four other western states soon passed similar legislation, but the movement quickly dissipated with the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980.

Frank Gregg, BLM Director from 1978–1981, said, “I was determined to help the Bureau build on FLPMA to establish a stable, professional public land management program genuinely responsive to the diverse range of demands on public land resources. I saw the land use planning process mandated by FLPMA as a way of assuring that all points of view were brought to bear on land use decisions in the field, and to enhance the capacity of the Washington Office to influence policy decisions of the Department, Office of Management and Budget, and the Congress affecting public lands.”



As BLM Director from 1978–81, Frank Gregg initiated the implementation of FLPMA, finalized new mineral leasing policies, upgraded the land use planning process, encouraged efforts to learn more about nonchemical methods for vegetation management, and oversaw BLM’s efforts to secure passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

A delay in getting Gregg installed as Director was particularly frustrating for him because Secretary Andrus and Assistant Secretary Martin moved quickly with policy and program changes. “The Bureau’s career leaders had looked forward to having a strong hand in early implementation of FLPMA,” recalls Gregg. “Instead it often found itself responding to individual initiatives from Secretarial offices, formulated outside the multiple-use context the Bureau preferred.”

“As a signal to public land user groups, I held a series of well-publicized meetings in several western states in which local, regional, and national issues were discussed with audiences representing the full range of interest groups. The objective was simple: to let all hands know they could expect even-handed responses on wilderness, grazing administration, coal leasing, and other controversies. The strategy worked. Even at the height of Sagebrush Rebellion oratory, communications with public land users and their political allies were easy and open.”

During Gregg’s tenure, emphasis was given to both renewable and nonrenewable resources. A new coal leasing program and EIS were formulated, and leasing resumed in 1980 without legal challenge. The wilderness review mandated by FLPMA was objectively undertaken to avoid demand for repeated reviews. Wildlife habitat management programs were strengthened, and funding was increased for improving rangeland condition. A Special Projects Office helped meet urgent schedules for siting energy facilities. Outer Continental Shelf leasing was expanded, and the first-ever regulations on surface effects of hardrock mining took effect. With the help of a strong citizens’ advisory committee, the California Desert Plan was also completed.

Citing some challenges with the Carter administration, Gregg adds, “BLM’s progress toward establishing itself as a strong, stable institution of career natural resource professionals was mixed. President Carter’s zeal to reorganize, including a proposal to convert Interior into a Department of Natural Resources incorporating the Forest Service, was the root of serious damage to BLM. White House reorganization strategists sought to win Forest Service support by downgrading BLM’s competence and integrity, and promising to consolidate the two land systems under Forest Service leadership. Even the Secretary occasionally joined in this forlorn tactic.”

BLM field offices were accused (inaccurately) by some western water leaders of planning to claim vast quantities in the process of filing under state law for water rights for land management. As time went on, the Carter administration’s support grew for BLM, and the agency’s budget was strengthened. There was unwavering Departmental support for coal leasing, wilderness review, and livestock grazing. There was also strong support among western governors, the environmental community and key leaders in the House.

BLMers had high hopes that FLPMA’s passage would bring stability to the agency. Employees wanted to concentrate on multiple use management, but they also knew

that pressures and conflicts would be great. George Turcott, BLM’s Associate Director from 1972–1979, once said “There’s no pressure like multiple use pressure.” Political volatility and controversy characterized the years immediately following FLPMA. In the early 1970s, coal leasing had been enjoined under a NEPA lawsuit. Another lawsuit forced the BLM to prepare 144 site-specific EISs to evaluate the effects of livestock grazing on public lands. Another series of EISs addressed timber harvest in western Oregon.

Robert Burford, BLM Director from 1981–1989, admits, “I was perhaps a bit more than a pacifist in the movement termed the Sagebrush Rebellion. When I first came to Washington, our public lands were being managed, not as belonging to all the taxpayers of this nation, but more along the lines of private playgrounds for a number of special interests. The primary concern was the preservation of those playgrounds. Lost had been the leadership to carry out BLM’s mission to manage the public lands for a multiplicity of uses, not just a single use.”

“There will always be a bit of one-upmanship, I imagine, between all the different users of the public lands—whether it’s ranchers, hunters, oil riggers, backpackers, river rafters, or hardrock miners. They each think their use as always the most important one offered by our public lands. The magnitude and value of the public land resources inevitably lead to conflicting demands by the many users of the public lands.”

“The FLPMA mandate for multiple-use management is BLM’s most powerful tool for reconciling these demands and viewpoints about how the public lands are to be administered. It would be a travesty for BLM to become a single-focus organization like the Park Service or the US Fish and Wildlife Service. It’s a balancing act to be sure, but while difficult, multiple-use provides enormous results for the nation. In 1987, for instance, BLM oversaw a leasing



While BLM’s stewardship mandate includes protection of wildlife habitat, cultural resources, and wilderness, these same public lands also yield a rich bounty of timber and livestock forage, as well as significant deposits of oil, gas, coal, and other minerals. Coal has been the dominant energy source for US electricity generation since 1970. Coal currently provides more than half of the United States’ electricity needs.



Robert F. Burford, BLM Director from 1981–89, continued the decentralization of BLM operations to the field and implemented a “good neighbor” program to improve cooperation with land users, conservation groups, and State governments. BLM field activities were consolidated to cut down on duplication in renewable resource programs. Burford’s 1987 policy for managing riparian areas recognized them as “unique and among the most productive and important ecosystems” on public lands.

program that produced 148 million barrels of oil from public lands; yet, on the other hand, we designated new, more sensitive lands as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) that now total 5.1 million acres.” (Author’s note: By September 2004, the number of ACECs had grown to 912 totaling over 12.9 million acres.)

“I set as my major goal a return to our congressional multiple use guidance. It was anticipated that with stricter attention to multiple use, conflicting user interests and desires would increase. To cope with this, I urged BLM employees to conduct their official public service duties in a manner that could best be described as a ‘good neighbor’ approach. It was intended to place a greater emphasis and sensitivity to our working relationships with state and local governments and the public lands users themselves.”

“As I reflect upon past accomplishments, I have seen a strong bond develop between BLM and the public land users. This partnership has successfully reversed the lock-up trend of previous administrations and returned control from the chosen few to local governments that are more directly responsive to the public’s needs.”

At the time, Burford was particularly proud of BLM’s cooperative efforts in the land use planning process. He saw the agency emphasize modernization and automation, and he helped to balance energy and mineral development with conservation of renewable resources. Another accomplishment was to get onshore oil and gas operation responsibilities moved from the Geological Survey into BLM so that one agency would manage both subsurface and surface regulation.

“Will multiple-use of the public lands survive?” Burford once asked. “It can, and it should, but it will take more work and a renewed commitment from our elected officials. Multiple-use, practiced wisely, is good for all Americans. Public

lands are for the public to utilize and to enjoy. We have come too far to abandon our efforts now.”

When BLM celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 1996, Director Michael Dombeck said, “Our overriding concern remains the health of our Nation’s public lands. Conserving and restoring America’s lands and rivers is central to everything we do.” The Northwest Forest Plan was an inter-agency effort to build a socially responsible strategy that was based on sound science. New rangeland regulations were implemented to restore riparian areas, move uplands into properly functioning condition, and improve watershed health. The PAC-FISH strategy began the conservation and restoration of hundreds of miles of riparian areas and critical habitat for salmon and steelhead. Through land exchanges, public land ownership patterns were improved. BLM led efforts to check the spread of noxious weeds and implement a fire policy to protect lives and property while recognizing the ecological role of fire in natural systems. BLM improved customer service through collaborative management and the use of Resource Advisory Councils. Finally, BLM was given management responsibility for the 1.7-million-acre Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument. “That was an historic first for the Bureau,” said Dombeck, “and represented a clear endorsement of BLM’s capability to improve and maintain the health of the land.”

In 1997, Director Pat Shea acknowledged the importance of collaborative management, cooperation and strategic planning. “Everyone gains when people work together. Our multiple-use mandate puts us in an ideal position to facilitate the work of Resource Advisory Councils and similar efforts. Starting with sometimes diverse viewpoints and perspectives, we can work with others to help shape agreement on principles and on-the-ground actions. Another major accomplishment in 1997 was the completion of our Strategic Plan. This plan will help ensure that we are accountable for real-world results. We fully intend to ‘walk our talk’ as public servants and public land stewards.”

During the Clinton Administration, it was recognized that the demands of the fast-changing West and BLM’s declining capability could not continue without consequences for the land. To focus agency efforts, Director Tom Fry identified four land-management emphases for the agency. The first was land-use planning for sustainable resource decisions. Fry said, “Without current information about the land, its resources, and the desires of the American people, land-use decisions are difficult to make and even more difficult to defend. BLM must update its land-use plans so that our managers can make sound decisions that will ensure the land’s health and productivity.”

Secondly, he focused on public land treasures, saying, “As the West changes and grows, so does public appreciation for the special areas on BLM-managed lands. The BLM needs adequate funding to protect these congressionally and administratively designated areas, which include Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas, National Monuments, and National Conservation Areas.”

It was also apparent that healthy watersheds were crucial for resources dependent on them, such as habitat for threatened and endangered species. “The Bureau must act before threatened watersheds and riparian areas deteriorate to the point where they are beyond recovery,” said Fry. Finally, with increased use of the public lands by visitors, safety issues were becoming critical. Identifying and mitigating hazards on public lands were identified as high priorities for BLM.

### The 21st Century

In 2000, BLM undertook an important new initiative to help address the public’s desire for open space with the formation of the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) under the agency’s multiple use mandate. The unique system included special lands designated by Congress or the President such as National Monuments and National Conservation Areas as well as BLM’s extensive network of Wilderness Study Areas. It currently incorporates more than 800 different areas encompassing over 39 million acres. Traditional uses continue within these NLCS areas while some of the Country’s last, great open spaces will be preserved for future generations.

BLM is making significant strides in providing better management of recreation activities. The recent Recreation Fee Demonstration Program has been successful in collecting money at campgrounds, day-use areas or other public recreation areas and then returning funds to those same sites for maintenance or improvements. The Bureau continues to manage for the explosive growth in recreation on public lands, as well as ensuring healthy landscapes throughout the public land areas. In 2000, BLM implemented the Great Basin Restoration Initiative on 75 million acres to promote plant community diversity and structure in order to make them more resilient to disturbance and invasive species over the long-term.

BLM has recently released its Sage-Grouse habitat conservation strategy, emphasizing partnership efforts to conserve the remaining sage-grouse habitat that occurs on BLM-administered land. BLM requested an additional \$7 million in 2006 for conservation and restoration efforts for this declining species, including \$3.4 million to establish habitat restoration partnerships under the Challenge Cost Share program. In coordination with Federal and State partners, the national strategy lists 48 actions intended to improve sagebrush habitat conditions while ensuring multiple use and sustained goals of FLPMA.

BLM manages numerous commercial activities on the public lands such as oil and gas leasing, grazing, timber production, and mining. The direct and indirect economic impact of commercial activities on BLM amounts to about \$30 billion. States share in a large portion of these revenues collected. President George W. Bush has said, “America must have an energy policy that plans for the future, but meets the needs of today.” In 2001, the President established the National Energy Policy Development Group, directing it to “develop a national energy policy designed to help the pri-



Recreation and leisure activities are daily activities for millions of Americans and international visitors to the US. BLM-administered public lands and waters provide visitors with a vast array of recreational opportunities.



On August 8, 2005, President George W. Bush signed the Energy Policy Act of 2005, a significant piece of legislation for BLM. In recent years, on-shore Federal mineral lands have produced about 40% of the Nation’s coal, 10% of its natural gas, and 5% of its oil.

vate sector, State and local government, promote dependable, affordable, and environmentally sound production and distribution of energy for the future.” Technological advances, resource protection measures, and regulatory tools will enable energy development in an environmentally sensitive manner.

Over 70 Resource Management Plans have identified management of transportation and off-highway vehicles as priority issues to be addressed in finer-scale, implementation planning processes. Upon completion of the route designation process, implementation plans will call for considerable conservation and resource damage mitigation work. The conservation work will require such measures as re-routing or removing existing roads and trails, signing and mapping to direct and educate the public, repairing damaged resources through re-vegetating sage-grouse habitat, and conducting archaeological recovery or restoration actions.

Kathleen Clarke, BLM’s Director since 2001, says, “The Bureau of Land Management might best be described as a

small agency with a big mission: To sustain the health, productivity, and diversity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.” Responsible for 261 million surface acres and 700 million acres of Federal subsurface mineral estate, BLM has some big challenges ahead. Over the past century, the population of the West has grown from about 4.3 million to 63 million people. Today, 22 million people live within 25 miles of the public lands. BLM’s mission grows more complex each day.

Clarke adds, “We cannot fulfill that mission alone, nor should we even attempt to do so. Presented with our challenges, the Bureau of Land Management has been required to search more aggressively for creative new ways to carry out our mission. We know that we must look beyond our agency for solutions. Good stewardship of the public lands will not be found in bigger government, but in broader public participation in this land-management process, a principle we call Shared Community Stewardship. It is the broad alliance of government agencies, Tribes, local communities, private companies and organizations across America who comprise the hundreds of partnerships the BLM depends on as well as the thousands of individual citizens who volunteer each year to help us carry out our mission. We gratefully acknowledge the support we receive from these partners and volunteers. Their contribution to the success of our mission is immeasurable and we are indebted to them.”

The agency continues with implementation of the National Fire Plan, a comprehensive 10-year strategy for federal agencies to work in collaboration with States, Tribes, and local communities to reduce wildland fire risks to communities and to the environment.

## Summary

BLM experienced its greatest growth during the 1970s. The National Environmental Policy Act ushered in an entirely



Young American Indians from the Intermountain Youth Center use Global Positioning Systems (GPS), digital photography, and written documentation to inventory rock art on the boulders and cliffs of Black Mesa near Velarde, New Mexico.

new way of evaluating major federal actions. Wild horses and burros on the public lands were afforded new protection, and a host of new studies and legislation on mineral leasing, new regulations on soil, air, and water resources and final decisions on Alaska lands significantly expanded the Bureau’s work.

With the passage of FLPMA in 1976, BLM positioned itself to look at more effective management of the public lands. In the 1980s, BLM began to integrate its land and mineral records with information it maintained on natural resources, tying all of this information to specific locations through survey coordinates generated from the Public Land Survey System. The development of BLM’s Land Information System in the 1980s would come to have the same far-reaching effects on BLM that implementation of its land use planning system did in the 1970s.

FLPMA gave the agency a defined mission, and firm guidance for multiple use management of the public lands. Public land management has become increasingly complex, and it will likely remain so. Through cooperative conservation, BLM employees collaborate with others to ensure the agency’s continued success. During the past 30 years, the growth and diversification of BLM’s workforce are good indicators of the responsibilities the Bureau has gained in serving the American public.

BLM values its traditions and values these employees. There have been challenges and controversies on the public lands since 1785, with battles won and lost. More are yet to come, but opportunities still remain for BLM employees, land users, and the American public to cooperatively work together to manage the public lands. And that’s what makes the experience exciting and worthwhile.

Under FLPMA, BLM manages the public lands and their vast array of resources for the benefit of both present and future generations. As much of the areas around public lands are developed, the public’s demands and expectations on BLM increase, and the agency must adapt and develop sustainable resource decisions, while staying true to its multiple-use mission.

Innovative and creative public land management will be BLM’s mantra for the future. It will be interesting to see what the next 30 years under FLPMA bring. Managers and employees should be encouraged to stimulate, encourage, and reward creativity, freedom of expression and the willingness to give new ideas a try. During the agency’s 60-year history, BLM has clearly made a difference on the public lands. This will remain true as multiple-use management of the public lands is carefully balanced with the needs and wishes of the American public.

---

*Author is Supervisory Multi-Resource Specialist, Bureau of Land Management, Roseburg, OR, 97470, joseph\_ross@blm.gov.*