

The Big Picture

You've learned about many of the natural, historic, and prehistoric resources that can be found on BLM lands. And you've learned about some of the many challenges BLM faces in caring for them.

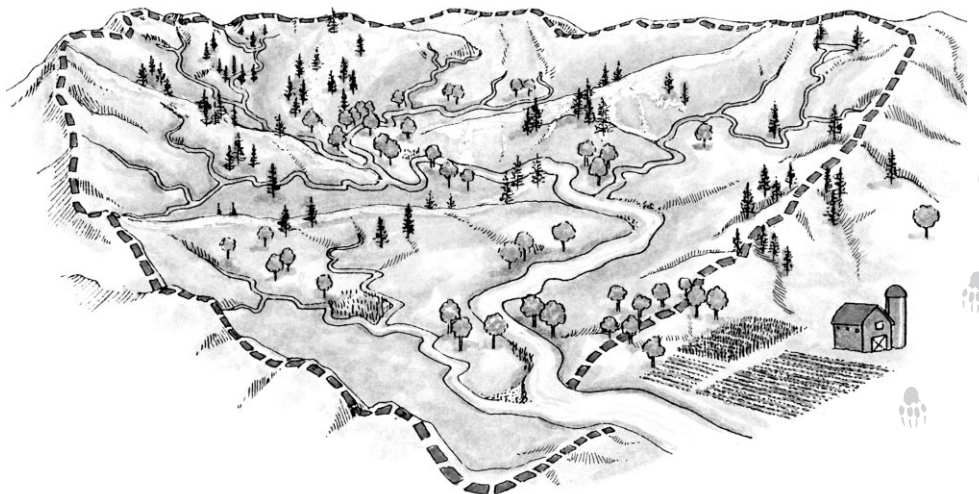
When it comes to solving problems—whether they have to do with wildlife or weeds or water—it's important to look at the big picture. That's because everything is connected.

Pick your favorite place on BLM lands. Look around and you'll see signs of many living things . . . and non-living things, too—all of them connected. They are part of what scientists call an ecosystem. There are many ecosystems on public lands—deserts, forests, rangelands, to name just a few. Ecosystems can be large or small. Earth is an ecosystem, and so is your backyard.

Ecosystems are one way to look at the big picture. Another way is to look at large areas that are drained by rivers. These are called watersheds. When it rains or when snow melts, the water soaks into the ground or it moves downhill to a body of water—a stream, river, or lake. As the water moves across and through the land, it picks up and carries sediments, minerals, and pollutants. These end up in our groundwater or our waterways.

Like an ecosystem, a watershed can be large or small. In the drawing below, the area outlined by the dotted line is one large watershed. But there are also many smaller watersheds within the big one. No matter what size the watershed is, all living and non-living things within its boundaries are connected.

A flower blooms. An insect dies. Wildfire sweeps over the range. The natural world is always changing. Because of all the connections, every change—even the ones you don't notice—will cause other changes. BLM has many experts who monitor changes on BLM lands. By keeping track of them and by looking at the big picture—at watersheds and ecosystems—BLM can do its best to make sure that public lands stay healthy.



—Watershed Watch:—

If you'd like to learn more about your watershed, check out the website of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov/adopt/). You can enter your zip code and find out about your watershed and how you can help protect it.