

2009 Budget Update

Healthy Lands Initiative

CALIFORNIA

California is a new Healthy Lands emphasis area for Fiscal Year 2009. The California Healthy Lands Initiative comprises three smaller initiatives:

- San Joaquin Valley Landscape Initiative
- Desert Conservation Area Landscape Initiative
- Modoc Plateau Sagebrush Steppe Restoration Initiative

San Joaquin Valley Landscape Initiative

The southern San Joaquin Valley in California has experienced extensive land conversion to farming, urban, industrial, and energy production land uses. Kern County, at the southern end of the valley, ranks as the sixth largest county in terms of oil production, fourth largest in agricultural production, and one of the top population growth counties in the United States. With nearly 90 percent of the lands of the Valley developed or converted to other uses, there are now many species of animals and plants listed as threatened or endangered under the Federal and California Endangered Species Acts. The California State Office of the BLM is working with other Federal, State, and local partners under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to develop a comprehensive multi-agency, public-private program to protect and conserve species of concern.

The MOU partners agreed to develop a permitting program that standardizes

and integrates Federal, State, and local regulatory mechanisms for habitat conservation, habitat compensation, mitigation measures, and cumulative effects. The Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) contains "safety nets" that conserve 90 percent of preserve lands as habitat, maintain habitat connections that will be at least one mile wide, limit additional disturbance to 25 percent of Valley Sink Scrub habitat, and require specific compensation actions for each listed species until conservation goals are achieved.

By the Numbers California Goals for FY 2009

San Joaquin Valley

- Restore 2,000 acres of critical habitat
- Reclaim 300 abandoned oil well pads

Desert Conservation Area

- Restore degraded habitat within 3.1 million acres of Desert Wildlife Management Areas and other special areas

Modoc Plateau Sagebrush

- Treat 10,000 acres of juniper encroachment per year to improve sage-steppe habitat

Meeting both our energy and land health goals requires integrated, landscape-scale habitat protections and resource management. Our initiative combines investments in habitat protection with policy improvements that will protect 800 species, including the sage-grouse.

Secretary Dirk Kempthorne

What is the Healthy Lands Initiative?

Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne launched the Healthy Lands Initiative (HLI) in 2007 to accelerate land restoration, increase productivity, and improve the health of public lands in the Western United States. The goal of the Initiative is to preserve the diversity and productivity of public and private lands across the landscape. The Initiative will enable and encourage local BLM managers to set priorities across a broader scale and mitigate impacts to an array of resources in ways not previously available to them.

The President's 2009 budget includes an increase of \$10 million for HLI over the level enacted in Fiscal Year 2008. The effort has focused on landscape-level restoration effort on southwest Wyoming; northwest and southeast portions of New Mexico; south-central Idaho; southwest Colorado; Utah; and a three-corner area of Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada. In FY 2009, areas in northwest Colorado and parts of California would be added.



The HCP has developed an “Oil Strategy” that describes the regulatory mechanisms and conservation objectives to continue oil and gas activities within endangered species habitats. The foundation of this strategy is to acquire 3,000 acres of listed species habitats up front in the permitting process to offset 1,000 wells drilled by the industry in established oil fields and listed species habitats over the next several decades. The HCP and existing restoration programs are the most efficient means of implementing a landscape conservation program among Federal, State, and local agencies and the private sector. The plan provides a roadmap for conservation of remaining habitats that will contribute to recovery of the San Joaquin Valley listed species while streamlining Federal and State Endangered Species Act permitting for oil and gas activities.

Desert Conservation Area Landscape Initiative

The California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Landscape Initiative would focus on (1) mitigating and restoring wildlife habitats, and (2) mitigating and preserving cultural resource sites, traditional-use areas, and sacred areas in the CDCA that are affected by the siting and development of solar, geothermal, and wind energy facilities. The BLM manages about 10 million of the 25 million acres comprising this congressionally designated area. The CDCA contains habitat for 25 listed threatened and endangered species, including the desert tortoise, Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep, desert pupfish, Amargosa vole, and Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard.

The BLM proposes to increase the rate of habitat restoration in the desert wildlife management areas by closing routes at intersections, removing traces of closed routes to the line of sight, and by directing acquisition in identified habitat linkages essential to the recovery of listed CDCA species. Because the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are active partners in the Desert Managers Group, a landscape-level conservation approach coordinated through this group will facilitate the processing of rights-of-way for solar, geothermal, and wind energy facilities in the CDCA.

Modoc Plateau Sagebrush Steppe Restoration Initiative

The most significant factor affecting land health in northeast California and northwest Nevada is the encroachment of western juniper into the sagebrush steppe ecosystem. As western juniper moves into the sagebrush steppe and the tree canopy begins to close, native grasses and shrubs are lost from the ecosystem. This loss of vegetative diversity directly impacts wildlife, resulting in dwindling numbers of key species such as sage-grouse, mule deer, and pronghorn.

For more information, contact:
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Partners

- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Modoc National Forest
- California Department of Fish and Game
- California Energy Commission
- California Department of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources
- California State Office of Historic Preservation
- Kern County
- Modoc County
- Pit River Tribe
- Klamath Tribes
- Alturas Rancheria

