

The Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) might best be described as a small agency with a big mission and a lot of ground to cover. As the Nation's largest land manager, the BLM is responsible for more than 260 million acres of public land—nearly one-eighth of all land in the United States—and 700 million acres of Federal subsurface mineral estate nationwide.

Where are the public lands?

Most of the BLM's land is located in the American West and Alaska—its holdings comprise about one of every five acres in the West—although the agency does manage significant tracts east of the Mississippi River. Land under the BLM's jurisdiction is the legacy of territory originally claimed by the Federal government early in the Nation's history. Much of the 1.8 billion acres of public land was either claimed for homesteads, railroads, and other private purposes or reserved as parks, wildlife refuges, national forests, military bases, or for other public uses. The BLM manages what remains—once-disregarded lands that today are prized for the array of values they contain.

Why are the public lands important?

The public lands serve several important functions. As the West's population has grown since World War II, the BLM has had to meet a corresponding rise in public demand for uses such as recreation, wildlife, and open space. At the same time, BLM lands have provided energy and minerals, forage, forest products, and other goods to a growing Nation.

Even today, these lands produce vast amounts of coal, oil, natural gas, wind power, and geothermal energy that help meet the Nation's needs. In doing so, the agency has shown repeatedly that the public lands can accommodate uses as diverse as energy production, recreation, and open space. In recent years, technological advances have enabled energy producers to operate on the public lands in ways that are more environmentally conscious than ever before, extracting resources more efficiently while further lessening the effects on the land.

Providing energy is just a part of what the BLM does, however. BLM lands are also crucial areas for meeting the pressure of population growth, acting as critical open-space buffers as western cities and towns expand. Furthermore, the BLM carries out an array of conservation programs throughout the public lands, such as protecting threatened or endangered species, restoring valuable riparian habitat, and preserving historical and paleontological resources.

How does the BLM manage the public lands?

The BLM manages for a range of uses that is as broad as it is impressive. The mix of allowed uses depends on an area's resources and local demands; for example, some lands are managed primarily for energy production, some for the protection of specific threatened or endangered

species, and still others for recreation. On all its acres, however, the BLM provides some essential services that protect the public, such as wildfire management and law enforcement.

The BLM's flexibility and responsiveness come from the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA). This law gives the agency the discretion to make decisions that satisfy a range of needs. Providing direction to the BLM for more than a quarter of a century, FLPMA guides the decisions that agency employees make every day. For example, as population growth has raised public interest in uses such as recreation and open space on BLM lands, FLPMA allows the agency to balance these values with traditional uses such as livestock grazing. And the BLM recognizes that achieving this means communicating with the public. By working with local communities, the agency ensures that citizens can influence management decisions near where they live and work.

What activities does the BLM manage on the public lands?

The BLM's activities fall into three broad categories: commercial activities, recreation, and conservation.

Commercial Activities

Oil and gas, forage for livestock, and forest products are some of the commodities that come from BLM's holdings. BLM lands account for 40 percent of national coal production, 11 percent of national gas production, and 5 percent of oil production in the United States. These lands are also important providers of renewable energy resources; 48 percent of the Nation's geothermal production and 15 percent of its installed wind power capacity come from BLM lands. In addition, the agency provides food and fiber to markets throughout the United States. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2003, the BLM managed more than 18,000 livestock grazing permits or leases on 160 million acres of land and sold over \$22 million in forest products. The BLM manages these activities under multiple-use guidelines that allow a variety of uses to occur on the public lands without necessarily designating a single use as supreme.

Recreation

The public lands offer a wide range of recreational opportunities. For those wishing to hunt, fish, or take part in other forms of outdoor recreation, the BLM has more than 200,000 miles of fishable streams, 2.2 million acres of lakes and reservoirs, 14,000 miles of floatable rivers, more than 500 boating access points, and 55 National Back Country Byways. Recreational use of BLM lands has risen dramatically, from about 50 million visits in 1998 to almost 53 million visits in FY 2003. The BLM works with a variety of stakeholders to ensure that visitors enjoy high-quality recreational experiences on the public lands.

Conservation

Besides providing recreation, BLM lands also serve as important areas for conservation programs. Over the past decade, the number of plant and animal species on BLM lands listed as

threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act has increased to 305. The BLM's restoration initiatives are growing to meet this demand. In States with sagebrush habitat, for example, the BLM is committed to conserving the greater sage-grouse, a game bird whose numbers have been declining for the last three decades. The agency is working with a variety of partners to carry out on-the-ground projects that conserve habitat vital to the health of sage-grouse and other species that depend on sagebrush for their survival. BLM lands also hold greater numbers and kinds of fossils than any other Federal or State agency's holdings. From some of the earliest known creatures to inhabit North America to the dinosaurs, BLM lands serve as a first-class laboratory for scientists from all over the world. In addition, archaeological and historical treasures abound on BLM land. American Indian sacred sites and cliff dwellings, pioneer trails, and frontier ghost towns are just some of the resources that the agency safeguards.

What else does the BLM do?

Wildfire Management

The BLM fights scores of wildfires each year, working to protect and restore landscapes and communities. Under the National Fire Plan, which guides BLM's and other agencies' efforts to respond to wildland fire, the BLM and the other agencies ensure adequate preparedness for future fire seasons, restore landscapes and rebuild communities damaged by wildfire, invest in projects to reduce fire risk, work directly with communities to ensure adequate protection, and maintain accountability by establishing adequate oversight and monitoring.

Wild Horse and Burro Adoptions

The BLM provides a unique service to the public. Through the agency's Wild Horse and Burro Program, qualified citizens can adopt a wild horse or burro and give it a safe and healthy long-term home. Adoptions are held several times a year, and interested members of the public can also bid on the auctions through the Internet. Management of wild horses and burros on the public rangelands is consistent with BLM's multiple-use mission.

National Landscape Conservation System

The BLM manages some lands almost exclusively for conservation purposes. The National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS), for example, brings some of the BLM's premier designations under a single organizational unit. By putting these lands into an organized system, the BLM hopes to increase public awareness of these areas' scientific, cultural, educational, ecological, and other values. The NLCS consists of National Conservation Areas, National Monuments, Wilderness Areas and Wilderness Study Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Historic and Scenic Trails.

Public Land Records and Title Information

The BLM is responsible for the survey and title records of the public domain, private land claims, and Indian lands. As the agency that succeeded the General Land Office, the BLM

maintains more than nine million documents that provide an account of the settlement of the United States. Any member of the public can easily find genealogical and title information by using the BLM's Automated Records Web site (www.glorerecords.blm.gov).

How does the BLM determine which activities take place in a given area?

Every major land use decision that the agency makes is governed by a well-defined planning process established under FLPMA. Land use planning is one of the most important tools that the agency has, as it ensures that the BLM manages the public lands consistently and in a way that upholds the principle of multiple use. The planning process, moreover, incorporates ample opportunity for public involvement. The BLM remains committed to this process, investing a significant amount of its annual budget and staff to planning.

What is the BLM's budget, and with whom does the agency work?

The BLM has an annual budget of about \$1.8 billion. The agency leverages its money by entering into partnerships with local communities, which create ties with the people who live and work closest to BLM lands.

How can I learn more about the BLM?

For more information, go to the BLM's Web site: www.blm.gov.

To obtain the name, address, and phone number of your local BLM office, please check the BLM's Internet Home Page (www.blm.gov) or call 202-452-5125.