

BLM's Mission and History

The Bureau of Land Management's vision is to enhance the quality of life for all citizens through the balanced stewardship of America's public lands and resources. Its mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

The Bureau manages over 261 million acres of public lands--about one-eighth of the land area of the United States--as well as a total of approximately 700 million acres of the subsurface mineral estate underlying both Federal surface ownerships and privately owned lands. Of these 700 million acres of mineral estate, about 165 million acres have been withdrawn from mineral entry, leasing, and sale, except for valid existing rights.

We in the BLM administer some of the most ecologically and culturally diverse and scientifically important lands in Federal ownership. Among our many varied responsibilities for managing and protecting our Nation's priceless natural and cultural legacy, we are stewards for:

- < Recreation opportunities
- < Commercial activities
- < Wildlife habitat
- < Transportation systems (roads, trails, and bridges)
- < Paleontological resources and archaeological and historical sites, including museum collections derived from those areas
- < Wild free-roaming horses and burros
- < Wilderness and wilderness study areas
- < Wild and scenic rivers
- < Rare, vulnerable, and representative habitats, plant communities, and ecosystems
- < Interpretative activities to meet scientific and educational needs
- < Public land survey system plats and field notes

The BLM was created in 1946, when the Grazing Service was merged with the General Land Office to form the Bureau of Land Management within the Department of the Interior. When the BLM was initially created, there were over 2,000 unrelated and often conflicting laws for managing the public lands. The Bureau had no unified legislative mandate until Congress enacted the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).

In FLPMA, Congress recognized the value of the remaining public lands by declaring that these lands would remain in public ownership. FLPMA also gave us the term **multiple use management**. This is defined as **the management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people.**

Increasingly, we are addressing the needs of a growing and changing West. The American West, where most BLM-managed public lands are located, is now the fastest growing region of the Nation. Eight of the 12 fastest-growing states are in the West, and the rate of growth in these western states averaged 30 percent from 1990 to 2000--more than twice the national average of 13 percent during the same period! Literally millions of people in rapidly growing western communities are now within an hour's drive of formerly remote public lands.

As a result of these and other changes, public lands are increasingly viewed from the perspective of their diverse recreational opportunities, their cultural resources, and--in an increasingly urban world--their vast open spaces. However, the more traditional land uses--grazing, timber production, and energy and mineral extraction--also remain important, especially to the economic and social well-being of many rural Western communities.

Many diverse partners--the general public, various constituent groups, and other agencies and levels of government--have been eager to join with us in collaborative decision making and on-the-ground projects. These cooperative efforts continue to greatly benefit the public lands and everyone who relies on them. We are very grateful for the valuable contributions of our many partners and look forward to continued successes.

One of our greatest challenges continues to be the development of more effective land management practices, while we simultaneously strive to become more efficient. We and our partners have already taken significant steps to reduce administrative costs, streamline work processes, focus on customer service, and improve our accountability to the American people. Our efforts in these areas will continue.

In these challenging times, we look forward to continuing our service to the public while strengthening our partnerships with all who use or care about the public lands. Working together, we can maintain the legacy of America's public lands--vast open landscapes and abundant natural resources--for present and future generations to use and enjoy.