

PART 2

HEALTHY PRODUCTIVE LANDS

Most of the benefits the BLM provides to the American people are resource based, and the ability to provide them on a sustained basis depends on the health of the public lands and their associated resources and values. Healthy lands support and sustain natural ecological communities that provide numerous benefits for the American people, including open space, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, clean water and air, energy and minerals, livestock forage, and other benefits. The BLM is committed to restoring public lands and their resources to, and maintaining them in, a healthy condition.

To effectively carry out its mission, the Bureau needs to (1) assess the condition and trend of public land resources, (2) identify risks to these resources and their condition, (3) identify opportunities for restoring resources that are in a deteriorated, undesirable condition, and (4) identify means to maintain resources that are in a healthy condition.

The BLM works closely with other Federal agencies, American Indian tribes, local and state agencies, and the general public in developing programs and projects to restore public land resources and their values, and to maintain them in a desired condition. Land resource condition is sometimes defined in Federal and state laws, such as those related to air and water quality. Condition can also be defined in more general terms, requiring subsequent interpretation and the development of measurable standards on a regional basis. Examples of the latter are the Bureau's rangeland health standards. The foundation for achieving sustained benefits from the public lands lies in achieving healthy resource conditions, and in balancing resource use with resource sensitivity and abundance, to achieve long-term stability of public land health.

Table 2-1, Percent of Rangeland Acreage by Ecological Status by State, provides a summary of the ecological site inventories that have been conducted by the BLM over the years. This table is updated annually to reflect new inventory work and changes in ecological status. Ecological site inventories provide land managers with useful information for determining site capability and assessing whether resource management objectives are being met.

Table 2-2, Condition of Riparian-Wetland Areas, was first reported in PLS in 1995. Riparian-wetland areas make up less than 10 percent of the public lands administered by the BLM. The benefits of these vital oases, however, far exceed their relatively small acreage. In September 1991, the BLM launched its "Riparian-Wetland Initiative for the 1990s," a program to restore and maintain these vital areas in proper functioning condition. A riparian-wetland area is functioning properly when adequate vegetation, landform, or large woody debris is present to dissipate the energy associated with high waterflows.

Table 2-3, Resource Conservation and Improvement Accomplishments, is a summary of the many conservation, rehabilitation, and development projects completed on the public lands during the past year. These efforts help stabilize soils, maintain or improve water quality, control

siltation and salinity, reduce surface runoff, and control flooding. They help improve ecologic site condition, promote healthy riparian areas and wetlands, and enhance overall watershed health.

Table 2-4, Forest Development Accomplishments in Acres, shows the numerous reforestation and improvement projects completed during Fiscal Year 2000. These efforts lead to improvement of forest health conditions on the public lands.

Table 2-5, Types of Wildlife Habitat on Public Lands, describes the various types of wildlife habitats that exist on the public lands. No single Federal or state agency manages more fish and wildlife habitat than the Bureau of Land Management. As the quality and quantity of the Nation's fish and wildlife habitats decrease, the varied habitats on public lands become increasingly important to maintaining our national fish and wildlife heritage.

Table 2-6, Estimated Number of Big Game Animals on Public Lands, shows an estimate of the numbers of big game species located on public lands. Most of this information is provided by the various state wildlife agencies.

Table 2-7, Fish and Wildlife Habitat Improvements Completed, portrays the variety of improvement projects used to enhance fish and wildlife habitats on public land over the past year. Habitat quality and quantity are the key to the future of wildlife. On-the-ground activities to preserve, enhance, or restore wildlife habitat represent a wise investment in the future. Most habitat improvement efforts are accomplished in cooperation with state wildlife agencies and conservation groups.

Table 2-8, Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Projects, displays the Bureau's fire rehabilitation projects that were needed to stabilize soils and restore watersheds after wildfires occurred. Fire rehabilitation actions are necessary to prevent unacceptable resource degradation, minimize threats to public health and safety, prevent unacceptable off-site damage, and minimize the potential for the recurrence of wildfire. The number and acreage of fire rehabilitation projects vary yearly, depending on the severity of the wildfire season on the public lands.

Table 2-9, Prescribed Fire Projects, shows the Bureau's efforts to utilize prescribed fire as a critical natural process to maintain and restore fire-dependant ecosystems, and to reduce the hazardous buildup of wildland fuels that threatens healthy lands as well as firefighter and public safety. Responding to the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, the BLM has revised Fire Management Plans, and land use plans as appropriate, to incorporate the use of prescribed fire as a management tool to protect, maintain, and enhance natural resources. Prescribed fire projects are often accomplished in cooperation with other Federal agencies, as well as state and local partners.

Table 2-10, Non-Fire Fuels Treatment, shows additional fuels treatments. The Bureau's Fuels Management Program is not limited to prescribed fire. Some fuels management projects are accomplished through chemical, mechanical, or hand treatments. These types of treatments are usually a precursor to the use of prescribed fire, or they occur in areas where the use of prescribed fire is not appropriate.