

National Assessment Prototype

June 2000

Introduction

In the 1997-2001 Strategic Plan, the BLM committed to “*develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for systematic resource assessment on the public lands.*” This National Assessment Prototype is a step toward developing such a systematic assessment for land health and resource use on the public lands. The Prototype tests the use of a small, carefully-selected set of indicators to portray patterns of resource condition and risk to public lands at the west-wide level. The Prototype Team used the set of indicators recommended by the Resource Assessment Strategy Team to develop maps and initial analyses from readily available data from both internal and external sources. While this effort was not designed to be comprehensive in scope or analyses, it provides a powerful look at the level of information available about the health of the lands and our management of them.

An important aim of a comprehensive strategy is to ensure that assessments of different geographic extent and purpose are sufficiently “linked,” that is, organized and carried out so as to eliminate wasteful duplication of effort and the collection of extraneous data and information. Starting with a national assessment provides a framework for collecting and reporting critical local and regional data so it can be aggregated to meaningful indicators nationally. This prototype is designed to provide an overall “snapshot” of the public lands and what we know about them. As you will see from reviewing the maps, it highlights areas and issues that need more detailed characterization through regional and perhaps local assessments.

Description of products

Twenty maps cover measurements or indicators of key biophysical and socioeconomic criteria.

Cover: BLM management responsibilities (land status)

1. BLM lands within subbasins
2. BLM surface parcel size
3. Vegetation assemblages
4. Cultural resources
5. Air quality
6. Water quality
7. Riparian condition – “acceptable”
8. Riparian condition – “unacceptable”
9. Special status species
10. Fire frequency and land condition
11. Weed distribution
12. Special recreation permits
13. Oil and gas application for permit to drill approvals
14. Land use conversion
15. Economic dependency
16. Grazing revenue
17. Leasable mineral revenues
18. Per capita income
19. Population density
20. Population density change

A one page narrative accompanies each of these maps to describe some basic information about the map: what is portrayed and the source and quality of the data. Along with this information, the result of initial analysis is presented - some correlations that are apparent from simple overlays, relevance of this information to BLM lands and decisions, information about the resources obtained from program specialists that render the map more meaningful, and management concerns that the information suggests.

In addition, 5 mylar overlays are provided in a separate pocket to increase the utility of these twenty maps:

Land status
Special status species
Land use conversion
Population density
Congressional districts

Additional maps were prepared in the process of selecting these basic twenty maps. They will be available for distribution in July 2000. The additional maps include:

Special areas
Fossil resource potential
Air quality: visibility
Water quality: category 1 watersheds
Riparian amount
Riparian condition (not rated)
Soil stability
Imperiled species on BLM lands
Insect and disease risk to forested ecosystems
Recreation use (hunting, fishing and wildlife watching)
Grazing permits and leases
Change in per capita income
Proximity of BLM lands to population centers and growth areas
Natural amenities index

We hope to be able to provide the following maps in July as well:

Land features (terrain, rivers, transportation, major cities)
Planning areas
Road density index
Mining

Uses

This prototype was designed for four basic purposes:

1. Provide information for sound decision-making
2. Create a visual representation to more easily inform the public about BLM, particularly the agency's budget needs
3. Provide a base upon which to develop a systematic assessment strategy for the BLM
4. Generate a baseline to determine change in the condition of the public lands

In the course of developing this prototype, many more specific uses were identified for this national level information. Budget, communications, policy-making, and support for regional or local decisions were areas most frequently mentioned.

For budget purposes, it can be used to:

- ✓ explain budget requests and strategic planning
- ✓ illustrate compelling priorities for funding allocation
- ✓ set planning target allocations
- ✓ improve understanding of situational variations throughout the public land states

As a communications tool, it:

- ✓ provides readily understandable information for reaching the public and elected officials
- ✓ can be used for orientation for new employees or transitioning managers
- ✓ provides resource information to field offices and local communities for addressing issues across jurisdictional boundaries

It can be used in national policy-making to:

- ✓ identify patterns, ecosystem-wide characteristics, and major socioeconomic trends of use and enjoyment of the public lands
- ✓ help set priorities
- ✓ inform legislative efforts
- ✓ provide spatial approach to oversight and accountability

For regional or local decisions, this information is helpful for:

- ✓ providing context for regional-level assessments
- ✓ compiling basic data to be considered in more rigorous or local analyses
- ✓ providing context for land use decisions
- ✓ identifying priorities for planning and NEPA activities
- ✓ supporting planning/NEPA documents (though not part of the plans)
- ✓ developing natural resource conservation strategies
- ✓ Identifying needs for special management areas
- ✓ setting local or regional allocations

Considerations

A few thoughts you should keep in mind while using these materials –

Many agencies and organizations have other efforts underway to categorize land health. We believe this prototype is a start toward defining the way BLM considers and reports on the health of the land and our management of the public resources.

There are many other options for presenting the available information. There is a considerable wealth of additional data that could be translated into similar products if the resources are directed towards doing such in a systematic approach. Much of the data we would like to present is simply unavailable without considerable expenditures of resources.

These are not perfect indicators. They do represent the best available data with west-wide consistency for these criteria. Use and feedback should refine and improve on these indicators.

There are too many possible combinations for any analysis to be exhaustive. Even with perfect data and rigorous analysis, we still have to make hard decisions.

No one map tells the whole story. But each does tell us something that needs to be considered.

Correlations do not equal causation. They do lead us to find out why these occurrences correlate, or what options this provides us in our management of the lands and resources.

In many instances, the data were smoothed to present detailed information at a national scale. Small features do not show up at this scale. While this allows a valid representation at a national scale, finer detail should be used for site specific or local needs.

This prototype doesn't replace field surveys. It may start to provide a framework for collecting and reporting field surveys so the data can be aggregated to the national level spatially.

This is a snapshot in time. Where possible, relevant trend indicators are included. This was not possible nor meaningful for all indicators.

The focus for this effort was public lands and resources. As a result, most of the maps concentrate on what is occurring on BLM-managed interests. Some of the maps are not limited to BLM, as they are more relevant to BLM decision-making when what occurs on BLM lands are considered in the context of what is happening around them.