BLM Restores Guidance for Managing Lands with Wilderness Characteristics as Part of Multiple-Use Mission

Describes Open Process for Local Communities, States, Tribes, and the Public to Help Shape Management of Public Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) today issued guidance to its field managers describing how the agency will use its land use planning process to enable local communities, States, Tribes, the public, and stakeholders to help determine how to manage public lands with wilderness characteristics.

The guidance will ensure public lands with wilderness characteristics are inventoried, described, and managed in accordance with Secretarial Order 3310, issued by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar in December.

Since 2003, when its wilderness inventory handbook was revoked as a result of a controversial out-of-court settlement between then-Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, the State of Utah, and other parties, BLM has lacked comprehensive, long-term guidance on how to identify and manage lands with wilderness characteristics.

“The Wild Lands policy describes the open process for taking a good look at these lands and hearing from the public, States, local officials, and Tribes on how they should be used to meet our multiple-use mission responsibilities,” said BLM Director Bob Abbey. “This is a common sense approach that also makes sound economic sense. Last year, hunting, fishing, and other recreational uses of BLM lands generated $7.4 billion for local economies throughout the West.”

Secretarial Order 3310 directs the BLM to consider, as part of its existing land-use planning process – which includes substantial public input – whether to designate appropriate areas with wilderness characteristics under its jurisdiction as “Wild Lands” and to manage them to protect their wilderness values.

The Secretarial Order restores balance to the management of the Nation’s public lands and provides national guidance to the BLM on how to meet its obligation to identify and consider lands with wilderness characteristics. The Order requires the BLM to consider all of the resources on public lands—including wilderness characteristics—in its land-use planning
process. Lands with wilderness characteristics provide outstanding recreational opportunities, as well as cultural, scientific, historical, and ecological resources.

“It’s important to know that this Order doesn’t change the management of a single acre of public land, but simply broadens the management tools available through the public land-use planning process,” Abbey said.

For a fact sheet on the Wild Lands policy, click here.

The BLM manages more land – over 245 million acres – than any other Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about $1 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.