

PART 5

PRESERVE NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The public lands encompass some of the United States' last, great open spaces. They contain exceptional geologic formations; comparatively undisturbed native plant and animal communities; wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers; and innumerable paleontological, archaeological, and historical sites. These resources are scientifically, ecologically, culturally, educationally, and recreationally important, representing a significant part of our Nation's natural and cultural heritage.

Congress has passed a variety of laws concerning the management and use of these heritage resources, including the Antiquities Act (1906), the Wilderness Act (1964), the National Historic Preservation Act (1966), the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968), the Sikes Act (1974), the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (1976), the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (1979), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990).

Many of these laws establish procedures for formally recognizing areas that are unique or that contain significant scientific, educational, and recreational values. Some of these designations, including National Conservation Areas and National Monuments, require Congressional or Presidential action. Others, such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), are BLM designations established through land use planning or other administrative procedures. Over the past 30 years, beginning with the designation of the King Range National Conservation Area, many extraordinary landscapes on our public lands have been given protective designations either by an Act of Congress or by Presidential Proclamation.

National Landscape Conservation System

The BLM established the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) to provide a national framework for managing Congressionally and Presidentially designated special areas on the public lands. This system includes all of the BLM's National Conservation Areas, Wilderness Areas, National Historic and Scenic Trails, Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Monuments, and Wilderness Study Areas. Taken together, these areas include almost 830 BLM units encompassing more than 43 million acres of public land – an area more than half the size of the National Park System.

This conservation system is designed to be different from either the National Park System or the National Refuge System. Most visitor facilities are located in adjacent communities, providing local economic opportunities and minimizing new development in the special areas. Many traditional public land uses, such as livestock grazing, are permitted in these areas, and adjacent communities and interested publics are encouraged to participate in the planning for and ongoing management of them.

The following tables provide statistics for the conservation units included in the NLCS:

- 5-1 National Landscape Conservation System: Number and Size of Designated Areas
- 5-2 National Monuments within the National Landscape Conservation System
- 5-3 National Conservation Areas within the National Landscape Conservation System
- 5-4 Designated Wilderness within the National Landscape Conservation System
- 5-5 Wilderness Study Areas within the National Landscape Conservation System
- 5-6 BLM Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers
- 5-7 National Historic and Scenic Trails

Administrative Natural and Cultural Heritage Designations

On all of America's public lands, the BLM, in addition to the responsibilities noted above, works to preserve and protect threatened and endangered species; wild free-roaming horses and burros; significant archaeological, paleontological, and historical sites; areas of critical environmental concern; and other outstanding natural areas. Some of those responsibilities are portrayed in the following tables:

Table 5-8. The BLM strives to improve its management efficiency by consolidating lands into manageable areas through land exchanges. These consolidations help us to improve the management of natural resources.

Table 5-9. The BLM and other Federal agencies use 85 percent of revenues generated by land sales under the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act to acquire environmentally sensitive lands in Nevada, fund capital improvements, develop parks and trails, and develop a multispecies habitat conservation plan for Clark County. Table 5-9 shows specific acquisitions, accomplishments, and funding levels.

Tables 5-10 and 5-11. Bureau-administered permanent or seasonal habitats on public lands are home for over 3,000 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and amphibians. Priority treatment is given to federally listed threatened or endangered plant and animal species that depend on public lands for all or part of their habitat needs.

Tables 5-12 and 5-13. The Bureau also administers the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, which provides for the protection, management, and control of wild horses and burros on the public lands. A major responsibility under the Act is to preserve a thriving natural ecological balance on the range. To do so, it is necessary to remove excess wild horses and burros, which are then offered to the general public for adoption. Tables 5-12 and 5-13 portray wild horse and burro populations and adoptions.

Table 5-14. The BLM is steward for the Federal government's largest, most culturally diverse, and scientifically most important body of cultural resources. To carry out this stewardship responsibility, the Bureau's cultural resource management program is designed to inventory, evaluate, and manage cultural and paleontological resources on public lands under its jurisdiction. The BLM has inventoried over 14.9 million acres for cultural resources and has recorded almost 246,000 properties.

Tables 5-15 and 5-16. The Bureau provides special management prescriptions for public lands under a variety of special designations such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Research Natural Areas, and National Natural Landmarks. Table 5-15 lists the present Areas of Critical Environmental Concern managed by the BLM. Table 5-16 lists areas of the public lands that have Special Management designations but that are not included in the NLCS.