

PART 2

HEALTHY PRODUCTIVE LANDS

Healthy and productive public lands and waters support and sustain natural ecological communities that provide numerous benefits for the American people, including open space, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, clean water, clean air, energy and minerals, livestock forage, and other economic, environmental, and social benefits. Under its multiple use mandate, the BLM manages a range of activities to ensure the long-term health and productivity of the public lands and waters under its jurisdiction.

To effectively fulfill its mission, the BLM implements sound management prescriptions to (1) assess the conditions and trends of public land resources, (2) identify risks to these resources and their condition, (3) restore resources that are in a deteriorated, undesirable condition, and/or (4) maintain resources that are in healthy condition. The BLM works closely with other Federal agencies, American Indian tribes, local and State agencies, constituent groups, other public and private partners, and the general public in developing programs and projects to restore, maintain, protect, and preserve public land resources and their values for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

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, such as the BLM's rangeland health standards. The BLM manages the public lands by balancing resource use with resource protection to achieve long-term public land health and stability.

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

Table 2-2, Condition of Riparian-Wetland Areas, was first reported in PLS in 1995. Riparian-wetland areas comprise 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, land form, 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 BLM public lands during the past year. These projects stabilize soils, maintain or improve water quality, mitigate siltation and salinity, reduce surface runoff, and control flooding. They also assist in improving ecologic site condition, promoting healthy riparian areas and wetlands, and enhancing overall watershed health.

Table 2-4, Forest Development Accomplishments in Acres, shows the numerous reforestation and improvement projects completed during Fiscal Year 2002 for restoring forest health conditions on the BLM public lands.

Table 2-5, Types of Wildlife Habitat on Public Lands, describes the various types of wildlife habitats that exist on the BLM public lands. No single Federal or State agency manages more fish and wildlife habitat than the BLM. As the quality and quantity of the fish and wildlife habitats decrease across the country, the varied habitats on the BLM public lands become increasingly important in maintaining the Nation's 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 the BLM 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 lands 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, conservation groups, and a variety of other public and private partners.

Table 2-8, Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Projects, displays the BLM's fire rehabilitation projects to stabilize soils and restore watersheds after wildfires have 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 occurring on BLM-managed public lands.

Table 2-9, Prescribed Fire Projects, outlines the BLM's efforts to use prescribed fire as a critical natural process to maintain and restore fire-dependent ecosystems, to reduce the hazardous buildup of wildland fuels threatening healthy lands, and to ensure the safety of firefighters and general public. 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 BLM'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. Often, they occur in areas where the use of prescribed fire is not appropriate.