

PART 6

PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND RESOURCE PROTECTION

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) stewardship role, which includes preserving and protecting natural and cultural resources, also extends to protecting public health, safety, and property. The BLM is responsible for reducing health and safety risks to employees and the public; maintaining facilities and infrastructure; and protecting public lands from illegal dumping of wastes, theft and destruction of Federal property, misuse of resources, and wildland fires.

Table 6-1 summarizes the number of wildland fires and the acres burned during the Fiscal Year 2010 fire season on lands protected by the BLM or lands protected under cooperative agreements between the BLM and local fire agencies.

Nationally, 2010 was busier for firefighters than the previous two years but remained considerably more moderate than the intense fire seasons experienced across the country in 2006 and 2007. The total acres burned by wildland fires in 2010, although up from the previous year, remained far below the 10-year average. BLM acres-burned, however, amounted to 756,663 acres, more than three times the BLM acres burned in 2009. Acres burned on non-BLM land (fires that started on BLM lands but burned onto adjacent lands) amounted to 987,075 acres, which was down slightly from the previous year. The majority of BLM fires occurred on nonforested brush lands.

Of the states having BLM land, Colorado had the most fires in 2010 with 529, followed by Utah with 446 and Idaho with 412. However, Alaska saw the most acres burned with 878,590, followed by Idaho at 616,484 acres. Some of the high acreage burned, particularly in Alaska, can be attributed to new strategies of managing some fires with limited suppression (except when lives or property are threatened) to achieve natural resource benefits. With the exception of Alaska and Idaho, the other states with BLM-managed land saw their third straight year of relatively low numbers of acres burned. Next behind Idaho's 616,484 acres burned was California with 48,579 acres, and Washington and Oregon, with each having more than 36,000 acres burned. Arizona had the least number of acres burned of all BLM states in 2010 with 6,155 acres.

Table 6-2 identifies the major type of capital improvements that support the management, use, and enjoyment of the public lands for commercial, recreational, and other purposes. The trend has been for the BLM's inventory of fixed capital assets (buildings, roads, recreation sites, etc.) to increase over time. However, as the BLM implements its new Asset Management Plan (AMP), which was developed in 2006, it will begin compiling a list of real property assets that are candidates for disposition. Any asset that is no longer critical to the mission, or that is in such poor condition that it is no longer cost-effective to maintain, will be identified for possible disposal. The AMP provides the framework for the BLM to streamline its portfolio of assets and optimize the maintenance of those assets that contribute most significantly to the BLM's mission and strategic goals.

Table 6-3 summarizes the releases of hazardous substances and other pollutants and contaminants discovered on public lands. Historically, approximately 60 percent of all hazardous waste sites on public lands result from commercial uses. Landfills, mines and mill sites, airstrips, and oil and gas sites account for almost half of these commercial activities. The other 40 percent have been caused by illegal activities, such as midnight dumping of agricultural and industrial wastes, wire burning, and illicit drug production.

In recent years, about 90 percent of the hazardous substance releases found on public lands resulted from illegal dumping incidents involving debris or drums of biomedical, chemical, and petroleum wastes; pesticides; paints; batteries; asbestos; and illicit drug lab wastes. The remaining 10 percent of the hazardous substance releases came from fuel spills, mining wastes, and military accidents. The number of drug labs has essentially leveled off and even decreased owing to enforcement actions taken by both State and Federal law enforcement agencies. However, highly toxic and explosive drug lab wastes continue to be found far afield of the more expected urban locations and in regions not previously plagued by this problem until the last few years.