

What exactly is FLPMA? And why should we care?

Over the past several months, we've referenced the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA...pronounced Flip-ma) a few times. Since this Friday (October 21, 2016) officially marks the fortieth anniversary of FLPMA, how about just one more mention – this time in detail!

Thirty years after its formation, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was finally granted a mission. The FLPMA formally recognized what BLM had been doing on an interim basis for many years: managing public lands under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. FLPMA did much more, though—it granted BLM new authorities and responsibilities, amended or repealed previous legislation, and prescribed specific management techniques. It is often called the BLM's organic act, since it gives us the authority to do a lot of the things we do on a daily basis.

Here are six of the most important parts of FLPMA. How do they affect the way you experience public lands?

FLPMA mandates the permanent federal ownership of public lands.

FLPMA makes it law that “public lands be retained in Federal ownership,” unless “disposal of a particular parcel will serve the national interest.” This may seem like a no-brainer, but until FLPMA became law, there was still a question about whether or not public lands were to be kept in federal control or made available for sale. Interestingly, FLPMA repealed President Lincoln's Homesteading Act of 1864, ending homesteading (outside of Alaska).

FLMPA declares that we will manage public lands for multiple uses and values.

It directs us to manage public lands to:

- protect the quality of the scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archaeological values;
- where appropriate, protect and preserve certain public lands in their natural condition;
- provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife and domestic animals;
- provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use.

FLPMA repealed more than 1,000 out-of-date land management statutes, replacing them with new policies, including a new planning system.

Sure, it didn't affect the big statutes like the O & C Revested Lands Act, the Mineral Leasing Act, the Mining Law of 1872, the Soil Conservation Act, and about 1,000 others, but it did repeal and replace many that lingered from the days of the Grazing Service and General Land Office (like Lincoln's Homestead Act referenced above). It also mandated a new planning system for us – one that requires broad public participation, not just the involvement of those who may be directly affected by a decision. And it authorized citizen advisory councils - known today as RACs - to provide the BLM with input "concerning the problems relating to land use planning or the management of public lands."

FLMPA changed how we manage minerals and grazing in public lands.

For example, FLPMA declared that claims could be invalidated if miners didn't file copies of their claims and submit annual reports of their work, allowing the BLM – and other miners – to better know who was doing what, where.



FLPMA also required a new study of grazing fees and standardized grazing permit policies. Grazing advisory boards were also focused on providing input into the development of allotment management plans and how range improvement funds were distributed.

FLPMA mandated new forms of preservation and protection for public lands.

For example, FLPMA extended provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964 to public lands, since they had not been originally included. The BLM now manages nine wilderness areas and 88 wilderness study areas in Oregon and Washington.

Contributing even more acronyms to our repertoire, FLPMA also created ACECs (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern) “where special management attention is required . . . to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, or other natural systems or processes, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards.” Today, Oregon and Washington host 195 ACEC parcels, totaling almost 860,000 acres.

In addition, FLPMA granted law enforcement authority to the BLM, starting with uniformed park rangers to serve in the California desert’s public lands.

FLPMA helped to usher in a cultural change in the BLM.

Continuing the changes required by 1970’s landmark National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), with FLPMA, the BLM expanded its workforce beyond a focus on forestry and range conservation. As a result, the BLM now has professional positions in areas such as planning, recreation, archaeology, and wildlife biology to meet the multiple use mandate and facilitate broader public planning processes.

Even with increasing populations and changing demands for more and varied uses of public lands, the FLPMA continues to give the BLM a strong foundation for decision making that benefits both the lands and their users.

October 21, 1976 is an important landmark in the history of the BLM. On that day, aside from President Gerald R. Ford signing the FLPMA into law, the Cincinnati Reds swept the New York Yankees in the 73rd World Series. Saul Bellow received the Nobel prize in literature. Our cousins across the pond celebrated another Trafalgar Day. Actor Jeremy Miller (Ben Seaver from the 80’s television hit Growing Pains) was born. Where were you when the when FLPMA was signed?