

The BLM does....what?

A few months ago we wrote about the history of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and public land management. It was the kind of article that starts with colonial times and somehow ends up at the present with a swath of information about who, what, when, where, why and how the public lands system came to be. In case you missed it, here's a one-sentence summary: The American public felt strongly about protecting and conserving unsettled lands of the West, and decided this interest would best be served through Federal ownership.

So here we are with the BLM (and other federal agencies), managing public lands under the direction of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. The FLPMA gives the BLM its multiple-use mission, which means the agency manages public land resources for a variety of uses, such as energy development, livestock grazing, recreation, and timber harvesting, while protecting a wide array of natural, cultural, and historical resources – all done in balance and harmony with each other. In short, it gives us our mission statement.

For example – let's say there is a 640-acre parcel of land on Steens Mountain. That parcel is allotted, in part, to livestock grazing; it's also a popular spot for hunting and fishing (yes, it has a nice section of Wild and Scenic River running through it); it has an old homestead on it; there are juniper trees encroaching on aspen stands; and wild horses roam through its every square foot.

In this case, staff from the Rangeland Management, Recreation, Wildlife, Fisheries/Riparian, Cultural Resources, Fuels/Timber, and Wild Horse and Burro Programs work collaboratively to best manage that parcel. Its many uses must be provided for while simultaneously planning for the health and longevity of the ecosystem.

How many livestock should graze the parcel and for how long? What is the appropriate number of wild horses and burros the range can handle – including the other species that live there? How do we protect the homestead and manage the juniper before it completely takes over? What about the riparian zone along the river? Sportsmen want access to this area, so what are the best options?

Think that's complicated? Imagine balancing even *more* uses (mining, energy development, Rights of Way/easements/land sales/exchanges, etc.), and resources (noxious weed management, plant conservation, soil/water/air quality, etc.) across a few *million* acres of public land – all in coordination with other federal, state, and private landowners. Welcome to our work in Harney County!

In upcoming articles, we plan to highlight programs within the BLM and describe how they work together to provide the best management for your public lands. Do you have a particular area of interest you would like to hear about? Let us know by calling (541) 573-4519. And remember, the authority for the federal government to manage public lands is confirmed through a healthy stack of irrefutable U.S. Supreme Court cases. The United States Constitution is federal law and interpretation of federal law is done authoritatively by the United States Supreme Court. If you have questions on other topics, give us a call and we'll do our best to answer them.

