

**Statement Of Tom Fry  
Acting Director, Bureau Of Land Management**

**Department Of The Interior**

**Before The  
House Appropriations Subcommittee  
On Interior And Related Agencies**

**March 4, 1999**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify before your subcommittee on the Bureau of Land Management's proposed budget for fiscal year 2000.

The principal mission of the BLM, as reflected in our budget submission, is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. These lands - 264 million acres in all and more than 560 million acres of subsurface estate - comprise about one-eighth of the entire U.S. land mass. The BLM is a microcosm of the Department of the Interior as a whole in that we manage for energy and minerals, forestry, fish and wildlife, and wilderness while at the same time we are responsible for overseeing paleontology, archaeology and recreation interests. Given these challenges, the BLM attends to the needs of a growing and changing West, forcing us to recognize the increasing demands of public land users while addressing the needs of traditional user groups. All of this comes at a time when resources are scarce and obligations abound.

Where the BLM comes from is just as interesting as what we do. Our roots go back to 1812 when the Congress established the General Land Office to dispose of the vast "public domain" that remained after lands were set aside for national forests, wildlife refuges, parks and monuments. By the early 20th century, the Congress took additional steps towards recognizing the value of the assets on the public domain by directing the Executive Branch to begin managing activities on these lands. In 1934, the Taylor Grazing Act established the U.S. Grazing Service to formally oversee and manage public rangelands. The BLM was officially born on July 16, 1946 when President Harry Truman merged the General Land Office and the U.S. Grazing Service to create what is today the Bureau of Land Management. A clear mandate was established - the BLM was to manage the public domain for the benefit of all Americans, with a policy of multiple use and sustained yield.

This brings us to 2000, perhaps an era in which the BLM faces its greatest task - balancing the many interests and uses of the public domain with an expanding Westward population. While there are no clear solutions to many of the natural

resource issues that we face, the BLM remains committed to working with its stakeholders to implement its mandate. The BLM's successes with Resource Advisory Councils, or "RACs", is one example of this commitment. These councils provide a forum for local citizens to sit down together and resolve local issues in a spirit of cooperation and good will. Twenty-four RACs currently exist throughout the West and Alaska; each one is comprised of local citizens with varying interests and each one has been successful in developing standards and guidelines to focus BLM's efforts in achieving healthy rangelands. In 2000, the BLM requests \$1,829,000 to continue implementing these standards and guidelines by incorporating them into land use plans. Consequently, additional monitoring, inventorying and data collection will be required to identify resources at risk and to take appropriate management actions.

Partnership efforts are also at the heart of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Designated by President Clinton in 1996, the 1.7 million acre Monument in southern Utah is a place of remote and desolate beauty, with cliffs and mesas in a rich mosaic of colors. Working collaboratively with local interests, the BLM will complete the Monument's management plan to assure that grazing, transportation, visitor services and other interests are adequately met. Part of the unique nature of the Monument is the opportunity for scientific research it presents. Thus, the BLM, in cooperation with the USGS Biological Resources Division, the State of Utah, the Forest Service's Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute, and other local interests, is establishing natural resource baseline data that will be used for nearly all future scientific research efforts within the Monument's boundaries. In 2000 the BLM will also continue to focus on the management of the Monument and requests \$3,150,000 for the construction of three visitor contact stations at Cannonville, Big Water and Glendale, gateways to the Monument.

As public lands are increasingly viewed from the perspective of the recreational opportunities they offer, the BLM has taken extraordinary efforts to preserve them and make them available for public use. The BLM offers the public a diversity of recreational opportunities. In fact, this agency administers over 200,000 miles of fishable streams, 2.2 million acres of lakes and reservoirs, over 500 boating access points, 64 National Back Country Byways, 300 Watchable Wildlife Sites, 4,500 mile of National Scenic, Historic and Recreational Trails, as well as thousands of miles of multiple use trails used by hikers, bikers, and equestrians. "Beyond the National Parks," published in 1998, is the BLM's guide to recreation opportunities on public lands and remains one of the BLM's most popular publications with outdoor enthusiasts.

To address concerns about visitor and employee safety at facilities and recreation sites on public land, the Department of the Interior last year initiated an aggressive Safe Visits initiative. Building on this effort, and the support for it shown by this Committee, the BLM has developed a five-year plan for correcting deferred maintenance and capital improvement needs. The 2000 budget requests an additional \$11,745,000 in BLM's

operating accounts and the wildland fire account, along with \$8,350,000 in the Construction account for the first year of the five-year deferred maintenance plan. This funding is needed to correct the current, poor condition of many of our sites and facilities. In many cases BLM's facilities and administrative centers are cramped and in such disrepair that they cause significant threats to public health and safety. For example, the Cedar City Interagency Airtanker base in Utah is perhaps one of the most critical bases in the nation, but conditions at the base are deplorable, exemplified by damaged outdoor plumbing and insufficient room for personnel and equipment. In western Oregon, the BLM plans to address road conditions at several recreation areas including the Quartzville Creek Wild and Scenic River, where new guardrails are needed in areas of sharp curves and steep slopes.

In keeping with efforts to preserve open spaces for public enjoyment and supporting the President's Lands Legacy initiative, the BLM requests \$48,900,000 for land acquisition, including \$33,900,000 for two very important acquisitions that are symbolic of our Nation's heritage. \$28,900,000 is requested for acquisition of the 357,000 acre Catellus Corporation property for its inclusion in BLM's California Wilderness. \$5,000,000 is requested for the acquisition of 12,848 acres of inholdings within the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River that would preserve lands traversed by Lewis and Clark in their historic voyage. Both acquisitions are partnership efforts.

It should be no surprise that the agency with the most diverse mandate is also the one of the largest revenue-generating agencies in the Federal government, both in terms of funds that the BLM collects directly and the impact of BLM's mineral leasing activities on Federal revenues. Our activities not only benefit recreationists and traditional land users who own grazing permits or leases to drill for oil, gas and coal, but they also contribute directly to the viability of states' economies. In 2000, the public lands will generate an estimated \$1.4 billion in receipts from various sources including the sale of land and materials, grazing fees, timber sales, recreation use fees, and mineral leasing activities. Nearly one-half of these receipts is shared with states and counties with the balance going to the miscellaneous receipts of the Treasury and others retained by the BLM to support associated program operations. Without question, the BLM's contributions to state and local economies goes well beyond revenue sharing, particularly when one considers the impacts of tourism on economic development and the benefits that communities derive from our conservation efforts. Other BLM programs such as Jobs in the Woods are designed specifically to improve the health of the land while at the same time provide economic stimulus to local economies. Through Jobs in the Woods the BLM plans to offer approximately 165 job opportunities that will focus on 120 watershed restoration projects in western Oregon and northern California.

In 2000 the BLM requests \$1.3 billion for current budget authority. This is a \$79.1 million increase over the FY 1999 enacted budget level. The BLM's total budget request is \$1.4 billion, including current and permanent authority, which is an increase of \$92.4

million over the 1999 enacted level. While difficult choices had to be made in supporting the BLM's operational programs, we feel that the requested increases are consistent with Departmental and Bureau priorities and exemplify the BLM's commitment to sustaining the health and productivity of the public lands. Moreover, partnerships continue to be an important part of BLM funding. The BLM looks to non-Federal partners for a better understanding of resource conditions, trends, and community needs as well as for financial assistance with the implementation of on-the-ground practices. Through the BLM's Challenge Cost Share program close to \$9 million will be leveraged in 2000 to match funds on a 1:1 basis with non-Federal partners. Literally, hundreds of BLM partnerships exist with the express purpose of improving ecosystem conditions and promoting community-based decision making.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to briefly highlight for the Subcommittee some of the other requested increases included in the BLM's 2000 budget request.

The restoration and preservation of fish and wildlife habitat continues to be at the top of the BLM's agenda. At the heart of this effort is the BLM's request for an additional \$2,150,000 to build on past years' water quality and watershed health efforts, which form the core of many of our programs. Through the Clean Water and Watershed Restoration initiative the BLM will continue to reduce polluted runoff from Federal lands and promote restoration of watersheds, principally through collaborative efforts. For example, in Arizona resource assessments and health standard compliance reviews have identified restoration needs in the Middle Gila watershed necessary to improve water quality for the threatened gila trout.

In the Southwest, where 93% of native fish are listed as endangered, threatened or are considered to be of special concern, the BLM requests \$800,000 to continue critical habitat restoration work. This funding will be used to comply with recently issued biological opinions from the Fish and Wildlife Service and will address critical on-the-ground habitat improvements focused on riparian and watershed areas. Recent legal challenges in the Southwest have diverted a significant portion of BLM funding, but we feel that with the assistance of local interest groups and other Federal and state agencies that are working to develop a coordinated approach to long term restoration, the BLM can avoid future adverse litigation.

The BLM requests \$1,000,000 for its part in the government-wide Amphibians Initiative. The recent decline in amphibian populations in protected areas in the United States is worrisome and is speculated to be the result of contaminants, introduction of non-native species, or disease. However, to fully understand these species population declines additional funding is needed to evaluate and quantify the status of amphibians by observing changes in distribution, abundance, and habitat.

Approximately one-third of the land that the BLM manages is part of the Alaskan tundra. However, very little scientific information is available about these lands and natural resources in this region. The BLM requests \$1,000,000 to work collaboratively with other Department of the Interior agencies, as part of the Tundra to Tropics initiative to more fully understand from a scientific point of view this region and its unique ecosystems. Staff will begin to collect and analyze data on Alaskan surface water sources and river systems, develop habitat models, and process data on habitats essential to the production of various species of salmon. Given the complexity of ecosystems in this region, coupled with the lack of base scientific data, these efforts are essential for effective land management of the region.

A longstanding concern of the BLM is the health of its rangelands. The prolific spread of invasive weeds is causing the greatest, most rapidly accelerating adverse impacts to the long-term health of public lands to date. Noxious weed infestation degrades the productivity of rangelands, wildlife habitat, and adjacent agricultural lands throughout the western U.S. by reducing water flows, increasing soil erosion, and reducing forage for grazing animals. The problem is so bad that 11 million acres, or roughly 5%, of BLM administered public lands are currently infested with noxious weeds. This is an area roughly half the size of the State of Virginia. Further, we estimate that noxious weeds are spreading at an alarming rate - more than 2,300 acres of BLM lands per day. Past years of expansive inventorying support the need for treatments. Consequently, the BLM requests \$3,500,000 to expand integrated weed management and to treat an additional 60,000 acres of public lands, focused especially on early detection and immediate control of small infestations.

In the California desert the BLM is making progress on several resource issues and is requesting \$1,200,000 to support the California Desert Managers Group effort to restore desert lands. With the additional funding the BLM pledges to do its part to eradicate salt cedar, a noxious weed that has invaded most riparian areas; survey and prioritize hazardous material sites in preparation for clean-up; mitigate hazardous material sites by playing an active part in an interagency strategy to reduce illegal dumping; and develop a joint approach to burro management in areas with common boundaries and overlapping herd populations.

Finally, in relation to our nation's rangelands, the BLM is requesting \$2,500,000 to deal with the extraordinary workload associated with renewing expiring livestock grazing permits and leases. Over 17,000 permits and leases were issued to livestock operators in the late 1980's for a ten year period after many of our land use plans were completed. Now that these permits and leases are expiring, a more intensive level of review is necessary in order to comply with current laws and regulations. Approximately 2,250 renewals will need to be completed in 2000 and it is possible that an additional 1,000 renewals may carry over from work not completed in 1999; in contrast, our permit renewal workload in 1998 was less than half of the amount we can expect in 2000.

Mr. Chairman, other requests in our 2000 budget include:

\$700,000 to enable the BLM to participate in interagency reviews of the recreational and hydrologic impacts on BLM watersheds of 43 FERC hydropower projects;

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\$750,000 to expand implementation of BLM's trust responsibilities under an initiative called Re-vitalization of Indian Country; and

\$1,350,000 to accelerate the clean-up of hazardous materials on BLM, FWS, and NPS lands and pursue potentially responsible parties to cover appropriate costs.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to talk briefly about several of our successes as well as several important areas of national interest where the BLM is involved.

In California, the BLM has led a joint Federal/State effort to acquire and conserve the world's largest privately-held old growth forest. I am pleased to report that the Headwaters Forest acquisition is now in the final stages of completion, with management responsibilities to be assumed in 1999 by the BLM and the State. The Bureau requests \$1,000,000 in 2000 to complete silvicultural and watershed assessments needed to prepare the Headwaters Forest Coordinated Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, assuring that old-growth and old-growth dependent species are preserved and that recreation opportunities are available to the public. To assist with these efforts, the State of California is contributing \$1,200,000.

The Secretary of the Interior has identified as one of his top priorities the reduction of hazardous fuels to mitigate the damaging costs associated with fire, including threats to public health, property and safety, and fire dependent ecosystems. In keeping with this policy, the BLM more than doubled its fuels reduction activities from 1997 to 1998, completing 170,000 acres of prescribed fires. On a whole, the Department of the Interior increased its fuels treatments four-fold since 1996. In 2000, the BLM will continue these efforts and plans to complete 300,000 acres of fuel reduction treatments.

The BLM continues to make progress in western Oregon with implementation of the Forest Plan. Now in its fifth year, the Plan is shifting into a new phase of implementation that focuses more intensively on the survey and management of special status species, building on the past successes of watershed analyses. The BLM requests \$925,000 in 2000 to update some of these analyses to be compliant with the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. We also remain committed to offering the full allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of 213.5 MMBF of timber that is called for under the Plan.

The BLM's continued participation in the Recreation Fee Demonstration program has largely been a success. In 1999, the BLM's recreation fee demonstration program expanded to include 67 fee projects; collections totaled \$3.5 million and are used by the BLM for on-the-ground work, maintenance and education at the sites of origin. The BLM has entered into many creative partnerships to make this project work, including an agreement with the Pueblo of Chochiti that grants access to Tent Rocks through Pueblo property in exchange for 20% of the revenues that are used for a Pueblo scholarship fund and to fund a part-time position to monitor and patrol the National Recreation Trail.

A major push is underway by the BLM to repair damaged riparian areas in order to restore key wetland/aquatic habitat by improving water quality, correcting streambank erosion, and restoring habitat for fish and wildlife. In 1999 the BLM plans to continue riparian restoration work by assessing 1,460 miles of riparian habitat, 10,000 acres of wetlands, and restoring 800 miles of plant and animal habitat. Where practical, this work is done collaboratively with tribes and state and local governments that support efforts with matching funds. Efforts in East Douglas Creek, Colorado, are representative of the BLM and local land owners working together to improve an overgrazed riparian zone where fish and wildlife habitat have been restored to functioning conditions and are less susceptible to erosion and invasion of non-native plant species.

In 2000, the BLM budget request includes a large decrease for land and resource information systems. A program reduction of \$16.5 million is tied to changes in bureau-wide implementation that grew out of the ALMRS operational assessment, test, and evaluation, conducted in 1998. \$19.1 million is requested to revise the strategy, plans and schedule to emphasize a more modular approach to land and resource information systems development.

We fully understand that budgets continue to be constrained, that difficult choices will need to be made, and that there will be increased pressure on the BLM to develop innovative solutions to accomplish its mission. However, the initiatives presented in this budget exemplify the BLM's commitment to preserving and restoring our public lands for the use and enjoyment of current and future generation. Moreover, they address our most challenging needs to date on lands and issues as diverse as any of those in the Department of the Interior. We look forward to working cooperatively with the Subcommittee in meeting these challenges.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks. I welcome your questions.

[LINK TO MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BLM'S BUDGET](#)

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The BLM continues to make progress in western Oregon with implementation of the Forest Plan. Now in its fifth year, the Plan is shifting into a new phase of implementation that focuses more intensively on the survey and management of special status species, building on the past successes of watershed analyses. The BLM requests \$925,000 in 2000 to update some of these analyses to be compliant with the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. We also remain committed to offering the full allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of 213.5 MMBF of timber that is called for under the Plan.

The BLM's continued participation in the Recreation Fee Demonstration program has largely been a success. In 1999, the BLM's recreation fee demonstration program expanded to include 67 fee projects; collections totaled \$3.5 million and are used by the BLM for on-the-ground work, maintenance and education at the sites of origin. The BLM has entered into many creative partnerships to make this project work, including an agreement with the Pueblo of Chochiti that grants access to Tent Rocks through Pueblo property in exchange for 20% of the revenues that are used for a Pueblo scholarship fund and to fund a part-time position to monitor and patrol the National Recreation Trail.

A major push is underway by the BLM to repair damaged riparian areas in order to restore key wetland/aquatic habitat by improving water quality, correcting streambank erosion, and restoring habitat for fish and wildlife. In 1999 the BLM plans to continue riparian restoration work by assessing 1,460 miles of riparian habitat, 10,000 acres of wetlands, and restoring 800 miles of plant and animal habitat. Where practical, this work is done collaboratively with tribes and state and local governments that support efforts with matching funds. Efforts in East Douglas Creek, Colorado, are representative of the BLM and local land owners working together to improve an overgrazed riparian zone where fish and wildlife habitat have been restored to functioning conditions and are less susceptible to erosion and invasion of non-native plant species.

In 2000, the BLM budget request includes a large decrease for land and resource information systems. A program reduction of \$16.5 million is tied to changes in bureau-wide implementation that grew out of the ALMRS operational assessment, test, and evaluation, conducted in 1998. \$19.1 million is requested to revise the strategy, plans and schedule to emphasize a more modular approach to land and resource information systems development.

We fully understand that budgets continue to be constrained, that difficult choices will need to be made, and that there will be increased pressure on the BLM to develop innovative solutions to accomplish its mission. However, the initiatives presented in this budget exemplify the BLM's commitment to preserving and restoring our public lands for the use and enjoyment of current and future generation. Moreover, they address our most challenging needs to date on lands and issues as diverse as any of those in the Department of the Interior. We look forward to working cooperatively with the Subcommittee in meeting these challenges.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks. I welcome your questions.

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