



## BRIEFING STATEMENT

# BLM-MONTANA/DAKOTAS

MONTANA STATE OFFICE • 5001 SOUTHGATE DRIVE • BILLINGS, MONTANA 59101 • WWW.BLM.GOV/MT

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### **SUBJECT: MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM ACCESS INITIATIVE**

#### **I. SUMMARY:**

The changing ownership of private lands and the subsequent blocking of access to public lands has, at times, created a critical access situation in Montana and the Dakotas. At the same time, there is significant community growth, decreasing access to many private lands and increasing demand for access to public lands. Challenges are also being made against existing access.

Over the past few years, our ability to acquire public access to BLM-managed lands has decreased substantially due to the loss of BLM realty positions, a lack of funds, and an increasing workload. Access to public lands is a high priority for the BLM-Montana/Dakotas, and we continue to work to find ways to accelerate our ability to create more public access to BLM lands in the three states.

To address this issue, the BLM-Montana/Dakotas formed the Montana/Dakotas Access Board in 2011 to examine access issues and make recommendations to the State Director for pursuing priority access needs and opportunities.

#### **II. BACKGROUND:**

To achieve an effective access program, the BLM must: 1) utilize a variety of methods to acquire public access including land exchanges, fee acquisition, easements, right-of-way negotiations for reciprocal public access, Block Management, etc.; 2) utilize a number of tools such as BLM staff, BLM retirees, partnerships, contracts, volunteers, land trusts, cooperative agreements with state agencies, and funding sources such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) or the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act funds, etc., to secure public access; and 3) have a BLM staff member dedicated to addressing issues related to access to BLM-managed public lands.

The Montana/Dakotas BLM believes it is imperative that we proactively address the issue of public access on BLM lands. Our land use planning efforts identify criteria that can be used to prioritize our resources where they will be most effective. Current staff will use these criteria to be proactive in setting access priorities. However, we anticipate challenges in maintaining a staff position dedicated to addressing issues related to access to BLM-administered lands.

We recognize that the need for public access to public lands is not exclusive to BLM, and continue to work at the local and state levels to secure partnerships with our sister federal agencies, state and local entities, as well as private organizations interested in improving access. In some cases, working closely with agencies managing adjoining lands over a larger landscape may best meet the public's access needs. Some circumstances will demand unique and innovative solutions such as working with third party partners or developing alternative funding strategies. At other times, we may need to devise flexible ways to work with willing sellers to acquire land or easements through outright purchase, land exchange, or donation.

We will also work to identify and retain the existing access we already enjoy as we coordinate with local governments and interest groups. Improving signing to direct the public to accessible public lands is part of taking care of and enjoying the access already secured.

#### **III. PUBLIC INTEREST:**

Our partners in local and state governments as well as other federal agencies are concerned about access to public lands—both in maintaining traditional access and in creating new opportunities for the enjoyment of public lands. Private citizens and non-governmental organizations are also vocal about the ability to access public lands for a number of purposes and in a number of ways, especially related to recreation and hunting as well as more traditional development needs.

#### **CONTACTS:**

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