

## **PUBLIC ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS**

A land ownership map of Montana and the Dakotas quickly reveals a checkerboard of the public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. This scattered ownership pattern is the result of the federal government's early efforts to promote settlement of the West by transferring lands from the original public domain into private hands. What was sound policy in the 1800s has left us with many isolated tracts of public land that lack access and are, at times, public land in name only. A more mobile and highly motorized society has also led what is becoming a sign of the times—one that reads, “No Trespassing.”

The BLM in Montana and the Dakotas is being proactive in the access arena. In order to improve our ability to create more public access to BLM lands in the three states, we're adding an Access Program Manager to our State Office staff in Billings. This new member of our team will bring components of traditional BLM programs together to achieve many of our access goals. The Access Manager will also maintain a repository of access concerns so that needs and solutions can be matched as opportunities arise.

We recognize the need for public access to public lands is not exclusive to BLM, and we will work to secure partnerships with our sister federal agencies, state and local entities, and private organizations interested in improving access. Access needs are diverse. In some cases, agencies may merely need to blur jurisdictional lines in order to better meet the public's access needs. Other circumstances will demand unique and innovative solutions. At times we may need to work with third party partners or develop 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 acquisition, land exchanges, or donations. We hope that our renewed efforts will serve as an incentive for others organizations to join us and that the public will reap the benefits of our efforts for years to come.

Theses links contain more information about access:

<http://wildlifeconservation.gov/documents/HuntingEO1344372FR46537.pdf>

<http://wildlifeconservation.gov/documents/RecHuntingActionPlan11009dp.pdf>

<http://fwp.mt.gov/doingBusiness/reference/montanaChallenge/vignettes/access.html>

To see the job announcement for our Access Program Manager, visit: <http://www.usajobs.gov>.