

HOUSTON★CHRONICLE
OUTLOOK

The BLM speaks



Torin Halsey, MBI

Tommy Henderson, left, a landowner with property along the Red River north of Byers, Texas spoke Monday afternoon about a dispute with the Bureau of Land Management and several land owners. The landowners say they have clear and proper deeds to their property. Henderson owned 386 acres according to his original deed, but lost 140 acres to the federal government in a 1984 federal court case in Oklahoma. The dispute is complicated by whether the land extends to the Red River banks, the vegetation line or a medial line determined by the river's flow, which changes over time. (AP Photo/Wichita Falls Times Record News, Torin Halsey)

By Stephen G. Tryon

May 2, 2014

It has been my privilege for the past four years to work with the people of Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas to manage the public lands in these states in my capacity as the Bureau of Land Management field manager for the area.

First and foremost, I want to emphasize that the Bureau of Land Management is not seeking to expand federal holdings along the Red River, as has recently been claimed. We are planning only for the appropriate management of lands in federal ownership.

Second, I'd like to explain a little bit about the work that the bureau does on behalf of the American people. The agency's responsibilities include managing 245 million acres of public land, mostly in the West, and 700 million acres of minerals that underlie federal lands all across the country.

We manage these natural resources for a wide range of activities including hunting and fishing, off-highway vehicle recreation, grazing, energy leasing, conservation and hiking and camping. And we are one of the few federal agencies that brings more revenue to the American taxpayer each year than it spends.

On the whole, Bureau of Land Management programs help generate more than \$100 billion annually for the national economy.

We have a number of active and successful efforts ongoing in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. For instance, public lands located just north of Wichita Falls are popular with a wide array of outdoor recreators. In Oklahoma, families graze their livestock on some small tracts of public land.

We hold about 12 wild horse and burro adoptions events per year in locations throughout Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and New Mexico that result in the adoption of nearly 600 wild mustangs annually.

We are also proud to be working with the oil and gas industry and surrounding communities in areas where oil and gas development is taking place on public lands. The area north of Burkburnett, Texas is one of those areas

The work that we do is guided by long-term plans that are refreshed every 10 to 20 years. Right now, the Bureau of Land Management is in the initial stages of developing a management plan that will apply to public lands and federal minerals in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas and will include some limited areas along the Red River that the courts long ago identified as public land.



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Clay County land owner Tommy Henderson, standing in pickup, addresses a group during a news conference near the Red River north of Byers, Texas, Monday, April 28, 2014. There is a dispute between land owners and the Bureau of Land Management which claims the land in question is property of the federal government since the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. (AP Photo/Wichita Falls Times Record News, Torin Halsey)

The development of a management plan is a very open and public process and will consider a wide range of options for what the best use of the lands might be.

Members of the public and interested communities will have many opportunities to review the ideas being put forward and to provide input. The planning process is expected to last until 2018 or beyond.

Some have claimed in recent days that the Bureau of Land Management is seeking to expand its presence in these areas or to gain ownership of lands that belongs to private parties. Neither of these claims is true.

We are committed to engaging and working with landowners, the states of Texas and Oklahoma and the broader public as we work to determine the best management options for the lands that we already manage. As with all of the work we do, this process will respect and honor private property rights.

We welcome your comments and feedback on our planning effort. We will be hosting public meetings

throughout the region and look forward to robust discussions of how best to manage our nation's public lands.

While those meetings are being scheduled, you can contact us at the BLM-Oklahoma Field Office, 7906 E. 33rd Street, Suite 101, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74145, or send us your thoughts at **BLM_NM_OKT_RMP@blm.gov**.

Tryon is field manager of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's Oklahoma Field Office.

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