

OUR PUBLIC LAND HERITAGE:  
FROM THE GLO TO THE BLM



No. 1343



The challenge of managing public lands started as soon as America established its independence and began acquiring additional lands. Initially, these public lands were used to encourage homesteading and westward migration, and the General Land Office (GLO) was created to support this national goal. Over time, however, values and attitudes regarding public lands shifted. Many significant laws and events led to the establishment of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and laid the foundation for its mission to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

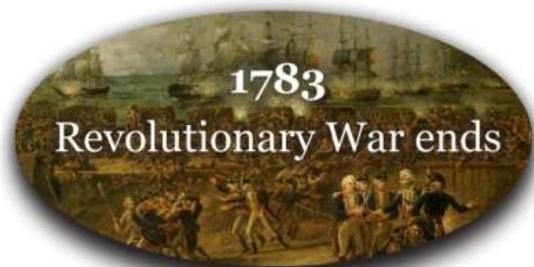
[www.blm.gov/history](http://www.blm.gov/history)

**1776** – Declaration of Independence Signed



John Trumbull's painting, Declaration of Independence

**1778** - Second Continental Congress begins persuading states to cede land to create the public domain.



**1785** - Land Ordinance allows settlement of public domain lands and establishes the government's rectangular survey system.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWIxHoGmBLO>

(Clip from the BLM YouTube Video: Eastern States - Guardians of the Past, Stewards for the Future)

Length – 0:51 <http://www.youtube.com/user/BLMNational>

**1789** - U.S. Constitution gives Congress the “Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting The Territory and other Property belonging to the United States.”

**1790** - First Federal Census is conducted. Population of colonies totaled about four million.

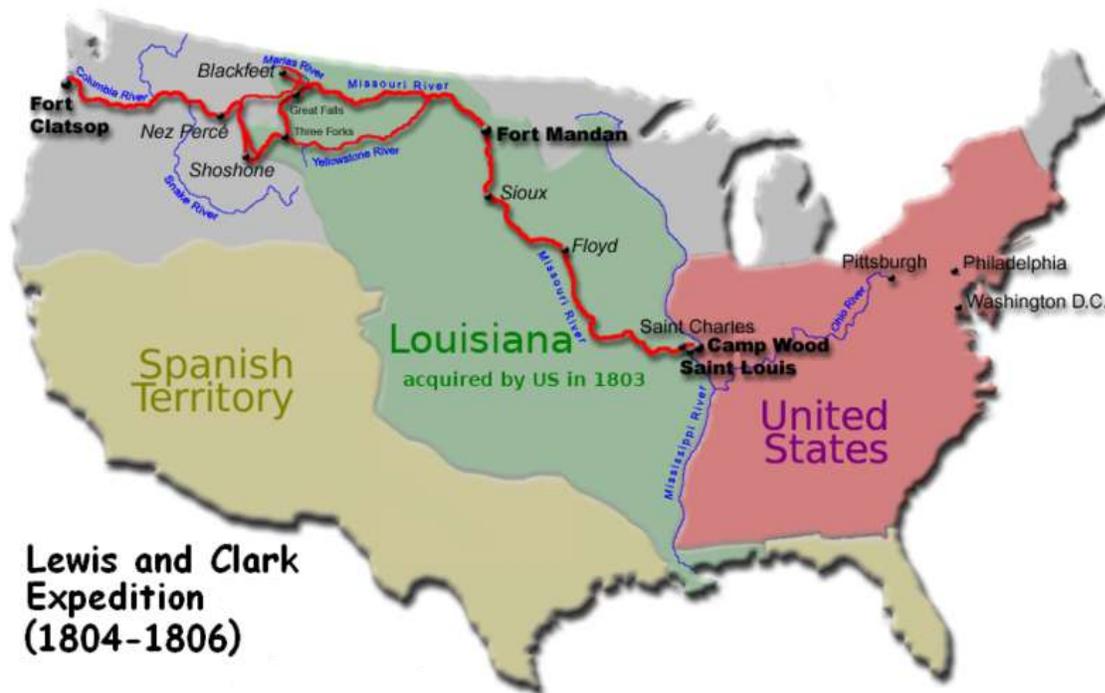
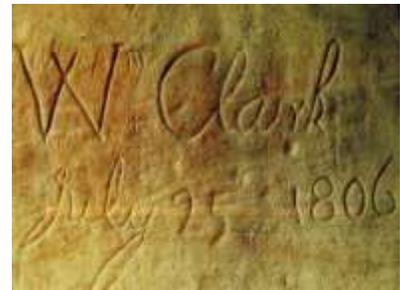
**1803** - Ohio becomes the first state created from the public domain.

**1804-1806** Lewis and Clark Expedition.



Meriwether Lewis and William Clark

(Signature) - On July 25th, 1806, while on his return trip to St. Louis, William Clark, of the Lewis and Clark expedition, carved his name and the date on the side of a sandstone pillar along the Yellowstone River. This pillar, known as Pompeys Pillar, is the only remaining on-site physical evidence of the entire Lewis and Clark expedition. Today, Pompeys Pillar is a National Monument, managed by the BLM's Billings Field Office.



**1812** - General Land Office is established within the Treasury Department to oversee disposition of ceded and acquired lands.

As the successor agency to the original GLO, the Bureau of Land Management maintains more than nine million historic land documents:

- survey plats and field notes
- homestead patents
- military warrants
- railroad grants



Many of these records can be found at: [www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov](http://www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov)

Life of a surveyor - The life of a surveyor was hard. Many oral and written accounts by surveyors tell the story of discovery, hardship, excitement, misery and financial loss. One 1852 field note record of an Iowa survey reads, "one of my men was accidentally shot yesterday and died almost instantly." The field notes continue with bearings and distances to the grave of deceased surveyor Ivy Johnson. Watch this video to learn more about surveying.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEYQaLEW3xk>

(Video) Fractured Land Patterns - Surveying the Land

Length – 5:18

More BLM videos at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/BLMNational>



Early Homestead

**1824** - Office of Indian Affairs is established in the Department of War and is later transferred to the Department of the Interior.

**1837** - On its 25th anniversary, the General Land Office has 65 district land offices.

**1843** - "Great Migration" on the Oregon Trail begins.



Wagon Train

**1844** - First geological surveys of public lands are initiated by the General Land Office in Michigan.

**1849** - Department of the Interior is established and the General Land Office is transferred to the new department.

**1850** - First railroad land grants are made in Illinois, Alabama, and Mississippi.



Workers joining the tracks for the first transcontinental railroad, May 10th, 1869.

**1860** - First Pony Express rider leaves St. Joseph, Missouri.



**1862** - Homestead Act entitles settlers to 160 acres of public land after they reside on and cultivate the land for 5 years.

## **HOMESTEAD ACT**

1. The first homestead claims came on January 1, 1863. Daniel Freeman and 417 others filed claims the first day.



On January 1, 1863, Daniel Freeman, a Union Army scout, was scheduled to leave Gage County, Nebraska Territory, to report for duty in St. Louis. At a New Year's Eve party the night before, Freeman met some local Land Office officials and convinced a clerk to open the office shortly after midnight in order to file a land claim. In doing so, Freeman became one of the first to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Homestead Act, a law signed by President Abraham Lincoln on May 20, 1862.

Freeman's homestead claim, proof of improvements and patent are used as examples.

Any U.S. citizen, or intended citizen, who had never borne arms against the U.S. Government could file an application and lay claim to 160 acres of surveyed Government land.

2. For the next 5 years, the homesteaders had to live on the land and improve it by building a 12-by-14 dwelling and growing crops.

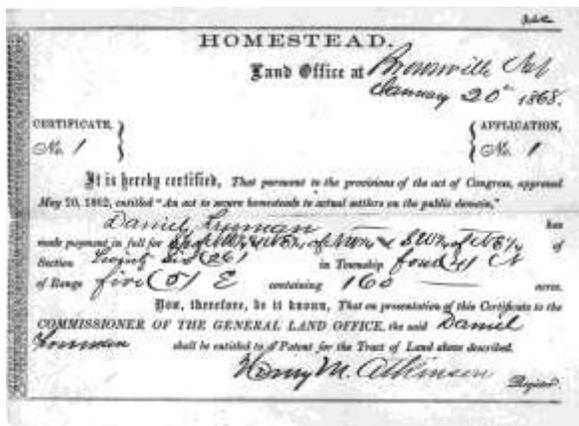
Physical conditions on the frontier presented great challenges. Wind, blizzards and plagues of insects threatened crops. Open plains meant few trees for building, forcing many to build homes out of sod.





Some land speculators took advantage of a legislative loophole caused when those drafting the law's language failed to specify whether the 12-by-14 dwelling was to be built in feet or inches. Others hired phony claimants or bought abandoned land.

3. After 5 years, the homesteader could file for his patent (or deed of title) by submitting proof of residency and the required improvements to a local land office.



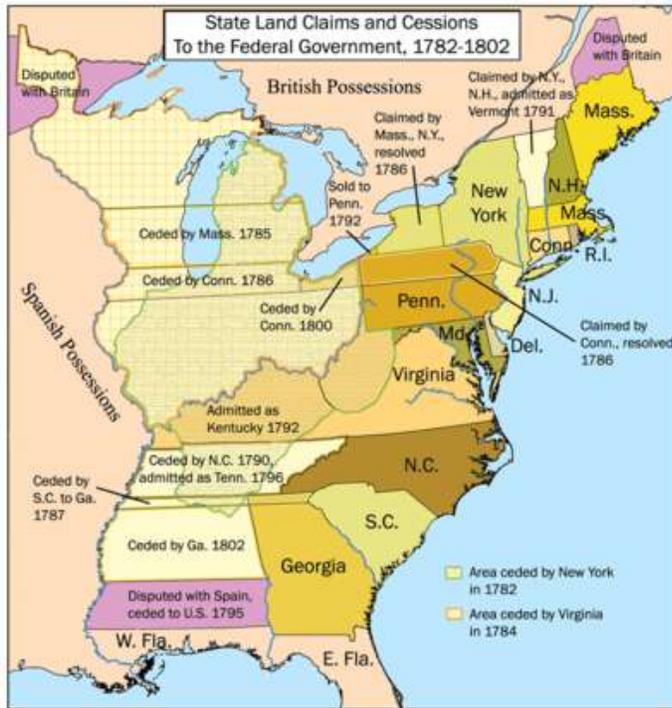
By 1934, over 1.6 million homestead applications were processed and more than 270 million acres—10 percent of all U.S. lands—passed into the hands of individuals.

**1862** - Transcontinental Railroad Act gives railroad companies rights-of-way and alternate sections of public domain lands along both sides of their railroads.

**1869** - First transcontinental railroad is completed at Promontory Summit, Utah.

## Land Acquisitions of the United States

1783 - Lands south of the Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi River are ceded to the United States.



1803 - Louisiana Purchase nearly doubles the size of the United States.





1848 - Mexico cedes California and vast areas of the inland West to the United States.



1853 - Gadsden Purchase adds almost 19 million acres of public lands in southern Arizona and New Mexico.



**1867** - United States purchases Alaska, adding 375 million acres to the public domain.



The original check used to purchase Alaska.  
The \$7.2 million check paid for 586,412 square miles.

Alaska in 1895 (Rand McNally). The boundary of southeastern Alaska shown is that claimed by the United States prior to the conclusion of the Alaska boundary dispute.



Rock art in Colorado Canyon

**1872** - General Mining Law identifies mineral lands as a distinct class of public lands subject to exploration, occupation, and purchase under stipulated conditions.

**1872** - Establishment of Yellowstone National Park marks a shift from disposition to conservation and protection of federal lands.

**1877** - Desert Land Act authorizes the disposition of 640-acre tracts of public lands to homesteaders upon proof of reclamation of the lands by irrigation.



Travel across the desert in California

**1878** - Timber and Stone Act authorizes the negotiated sale of lands that are valuable for either logging or mining and otherwise unfit for cultivation.

**1889** - Oklahoma Land Rush begins the disposal of federal public domain lands in Oklahoma.



Oklahoma Land Rush

**1894** - Carey Act authorizes transfer of up to 1 million acres of public desert land to states for settling, irrigating, and cultivating purposes.

**1897** - Forest Management "Organic" Act transfers fire protection responsibilities for forest reserves from the Department of Army to the General Land Office.

**1898** - Congress extends homestead laws to Alaska.

**1906** - Antiquities Act preserves and protects prehistoric, historic, and scientifically significant sites on public lands and creates national monuments.



Painted Hand Pueblo at Canyons of the Ancients National Monument

**1911** - Weeks Act permits the federal purchase of private land to protect the headwaters of rivers and watersheds and calls for cooperative fire protection efforts.

**1916** - Stock Raising Homestead Act authorizes homesteads of 640 acres and separates surface rights from subsurface (mineral) rights.



**1920** - Mineral Leasing Act authorizes federal leasing of public lands for private extraction of oil, gas, coal, phosphate, sodium, and other minerals.



Placer mining in Colorado, 1893



BLM range grass study, 1959

**1926** - Recreation and Public Purposes Act allows conveyance or lease of public lands to state and local governments for outdoor recreation purposes.



Evening Campfire, 1926



**1934** - Taylor Grazing Act authorizes grazing districts, grazing regulation, and public rangeland improvements in western states (excluding Alaska) and establishes the Division of Grazing (later renamed the U.S. Grazing Service) within the Department of the Interior.



**1937** - Oregon and California (O&C) Revested Lands Sustained Yield Management Act requires O&C Railroad lands to be managed for permanent forest production and provides for watershed protection, regulation of streamflow, and recreational facilities.

**1939** - Alaskan Fire Control Service is created within the General Land Office to prevent and suppress fires on Alaska public lands.



**1942** - Extensive withdrawals of public lands for military and defense use begin, with more than 13 million acres withdrawn in 2 years.

**1946** - Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is established within the Department of the Interior through the consolidation of the General Land Office and the U.S. Grazing Service.



BLM's first director: Fred W. Johnson

Grazing Service + General Land Office = Bureau of Land Management

**General Land Office** - To handle the rapidly growing public land business, Congress created the GLO in 1812. The GLO handled all public land issues, including sales, patents and land entries. Surveyors were sent out with tools of the trade to record in their notebooks all mines, salt licks, salt springs, mill sites, water courses and the quality of the lands. This information helped purchasers and homesteaders make informed decisions about the lands offered.

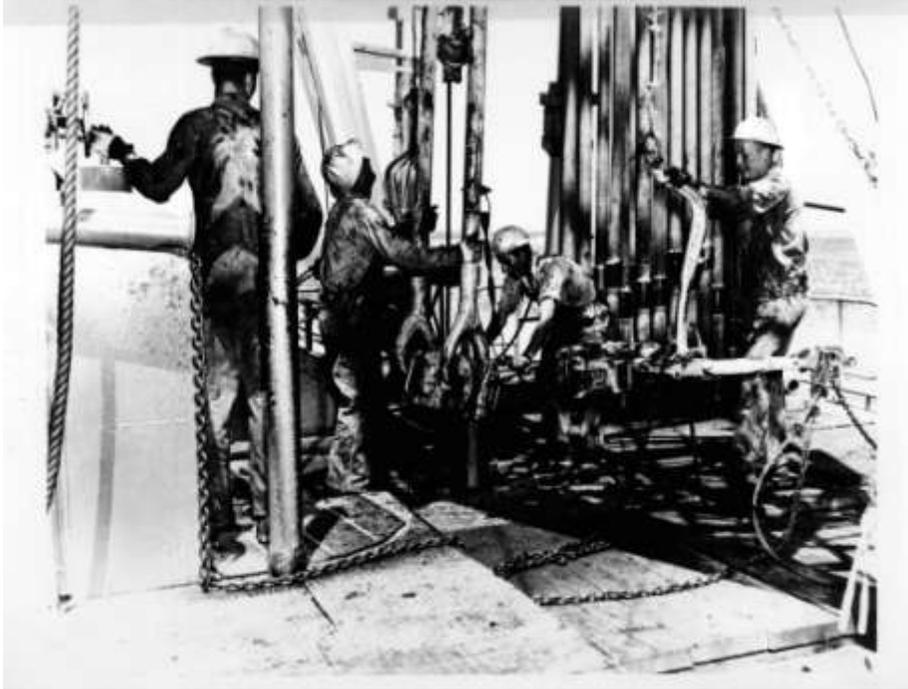


**Grazing Service** - With westward expansion came increases in livestock grazing and deteriorating rangelands. Between 1870 and 1900, the number of beef cows tripled, and the number of sheep quadrupled. The sheer numbers of livestock, combined with drought in the early 1930s, set the stage for the development of a new government agency. With the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934, Congress established the Grazing Service to manage public land grazing.

**Bureau of Land Management** - On July 16, 1946, the GLO and the Grazing Service merged and became the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) within the Department of Interior. Eventually, the era of homesteaders and land sales passed. Today, the BLM manages land under the principle of "multiple use" to allow all citizens the opportunity to use and enjoy public lands.

In addition, the BLM now has the National Landscape Conservation System- whose mission is to conserve, protect and restore nationally significant landscapes, which include many of the great American western landscapes. Original land surveys and settlement records, still managed by the BLM, help tell the rich history of the American West.

**1953** - Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to lease mineral lands more than 3 miles offshore; the BLM assumes responsibility for leasing through competitive sales.



Oil well operation

**1954** - Recreation and Public Purposes Act amends the 1926 act and allows the sale and lease of public lands for other purposes in addition to recreation.

**1954** - The BLM reorganizes and creates a state office system.

**1955** - Multiple Surface Use Act withdraws common varieties of minerals from entry as mining claims and allows claim owners to use the surface for mining operation purposes only.

**1959** - Wild Horse Protection Act prohibits the roundup of wild horses by aircraft and motor vehicles.



Alpine Loop in Colorado

**1960** - Public Land Administration Act allows the use of donations and cooperative agreements to improve and better manage public lands.

**1964** - Public Land Law Review Commission is established to study public land laws and make long-term recommendations for public land use.

**1964** - Wilderness Act protects undeveloped federal land to preserve its natural condition.

**1964** - The BLM adopts a new logo.



**1965** - Land and Water Conservation Fund is established for federal acquisition of outdoor recreation areas.

**1966** - National Historic Preservation Act expands protection of prehistoric and historic properties.

**1968** - Wild and Scenic Rivers and National Trails System Acts preserve sites with outstanding natural, cultural, scenic, historic, and recreational significance.

**1968** - Johnny Horizon program promotes public awareness of BLM-administered lands.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CS8Mk-4c9zU>

Video: Burl Ives and John –Don't Go Near the Water – Johnny Horizon  
Length – 3:47



Johnny Horizon Cleanup Days near petroglyphs in California, 1969

**1969** - National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to assess the impacts of their actions on the environment.

**1971** - Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act provides for settlement of aboriginal land claims of Alaskan Natives and Native groups; the BLM is tasked with the largest U.S. land transfer effort ever undertaken.

**1971** - Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act provides for the protection and management of these animals on federal lands.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YW9V\\_NF-Jv0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YW9V_NF-Jv0)

Video: Why We Gather

Length - 2:18

More BLM videos at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/BLMNational>

**1973** - Endangered Species Act requires the conservation of threatened and endangered plants and animals and the ecosystems upon which they depend.

**1975** - Energy Policy and Conservation Act addresses energy demands and establishes a strategic petroleum reserve.

**1976** - Federal Land Policy and Management Act requires that public lands be managed for multiple uses and sustained yield through land use planning.

# Federal Land Policy Management Act FLPMA 1976



In FLPMA, Congress recognized the value of the remaining public lands by declaring that these lands would remain in public ownership (end of homesteading). Congress also gave the BLM the term "multiple use" management, defined as "management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people."



"The national interest will be best realized if the public lands and their resources are periodically and systematically inventoried and their present and future use is projected through a land use planning process coordinated with other Federal and State planning efforts"

The BLM's mission is unique among federal land management agencies and provides the best opportunity to meet the many and varied demands of the changing West. In 1976, few anticipated the West's rapid growth and its associated demographic and economic changes, all of which have placed increased demands on the public lands. But because of the insight and vision of the people who crafted it, FLPMA provides the BLM with the tools they need to cooperatively and creatively manage the public lands, and in the process, dispel the notion that a variety of uses and resources cannot co-exist.



FLPMA also specified that the United States receive fair market value for the use of the public lands and their resources unless otherwise provided for by statute, and that: "The public lands be managed in a manner that will protect the quality of scientific, scenic, historical, ecological, environmental, air and atmospheric, water resource, and archeological values; that, where appropriate, will preserve and protect certain public lands in their natural condition; that will provide food and habitat for fish and wildlife and domestic animals; and that will provide for outdoor recreation and human occupancy and use."



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C54pBA9DNnQ>

Video clip from 1987 BLM Film Promise of the Land

Length – 3:08

**1976** - Management of the National Petroleum Reserve—Alaska is transferred to the BLM.

**1977** - Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act ensures environmental safeguards for mining and reclamation of mined areas.

**1977** - Trans Alaska Pipeline System begins transporting oil 800 miles from Alaska's North Slope to the Port of Valdez.

**1978** - Public Rangelands Improvement Act requires inventory, determination of trends, and improvement of public rangelands.

**1979** - Archaeological Resources Protection Act requires permits for excavation or removal of these resources from federal lands and provides stringent criminal and civil penalties for violations.

**1980** - Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act designates and conserves public lands in Alaska as national parks, wildlife refuges, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and forests and provides for subsistence use by rural Alaska residents.



Alaska Natives filleting salmon in Alaska, 1985

**1980** - Energy Security Act promotes the development of alternative energy sources such as oil shale, synthetic fuel, wind power, and geothermal sources.



Wind energy project in Wyoming

**1980** - The BLM completes its first resource management plan, covering the California Desert Conservation Area, and designates its first areas of critical environmental concern in Utah and California.

**1983** - Bear Trap Canyon in southwestern Montana is designated by Congress as BLM's first wilderness area (it later became part of Lee Metcalf Wilderness).



Bear Trap Canyon

**1983** - The BLM transfers responsibility for offshore leasing to the Minerals Management Service.

**1987** - Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act establishes a new leasing system and changes certain operational procedures for onshore resources on federal lands.

**1990** - Northern spotted owl is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, leading to an enjoinder of all timber sales on federal lands within its range.



**1992** - Energy Policy Act increases focus on alternative energy sources, energy efficiency, and reducing the country's reliance on foreign fuel sources.

**1993** - Presidential summit leads to the development of the Northwest Forest Plan to address human and environmental needs in areas within the northern spotted owl region.

**1994** - BLM Summit, the first ever gathering of all BLM managers, resulted in the development of a new strategic vision for the BLM.

**1994** - Rangeland Reform '94 amends grazing regulations and establishes Resource Advisory Councils.

**1996** - Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is designated by Presidential proclamation as BLM's first national monument.

**2000** - National Landscape Conservation System is established.

Video: The NLCS - A Geography of Hope

Length - 11:46

<http://www.youtube.com/user/BLMNational>



Tent Rocks National Monument in New Mexico

**2000** - Executive Order 13175 mandates consultation and collaboration with tribal officials in developing federal policy that has tribal implications.

**2005** - Energy Policy Act ensures energy efficiency and the production of secure, affordable, and reliable domestic energy.

**2008** - BLM-managed lands are officially designated as the National System of Public Lands.

**2009** - Omnibus Public Land Management Act authorizes the 26-million-acre National Landscape Conservation System and establishes permit requirements and penalties for unauthorized removal of paleontological resources from federal lands.



Femur bone fossil found on BLM land in Wyoming.



## 2011 Initiatives

1. New Energy Frontier - The Bureau of Land Management continues its work on environmentally responsible development of utility-scale renewable energy projects on public lands as part of the Administration's efforts to diversify the Nation's energy portfolio.



2. Youth in the Great Outdoors - Looking to the future, the BLM's youth initiatives feature a variety of programs that engage, educate and inspire. Focusing on youth from early childhood through young adulthood, BLM youth programs build on the spark of childhood wonder about the natural world, sustain interest through hands-on education and volunteer experiences during the school-age years, and develop into long-term engagement and stewardship, including the pursuit of natural resource careers.



3. Climate Change - Climate change is affecting public lands in ways that could impact on Americans' quality of life. The BLM is responding with two interconnected initiatives: a proposed landscape approach to land management and Rapid Ecoregional Assessments, which will improve the agency's understanding of public land conditions to inform future management decisions.

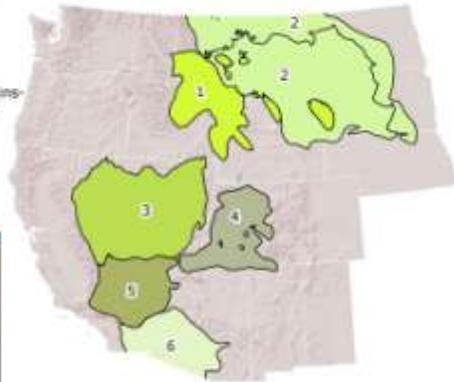


4. Cooperative Landscape Conservation - The BLM is using a landscape-scale management approach to better understand environmental challenges and support balanced stewardship of the diverse natural resources of the public lands.

## Rapid Ecoregional Assessments

The BLM launched seven REAs in 2010. This map shows the general outlines of the ecoregions being assessed.

1. Middle Rockies
2. Northwestern Glaciated Plains-Northwestern Great Plains
3. Central Basin and Range
4. Colorado Plateau
5. Mojave Basin and Range
6. Sonoran Desert
7. Seward Peninsula-Nulato Hills-Kotzebue Lowlands



Landscapes are large, connected geographical regions that have similar environmental characteristics, such as the Sonoran Desert and the Colorado Plateau. These landscapes span administrative boundaries and can encompass all or portions of several BLM field offices. A landscape approach examines such large areas to more fully recognize natural resource conditions and trends; natural and human influences; and opportunities for resource conservation, restoration and development. The approach seeks to identify important ecological values and patterns of environmental change that may not be evident when managing smaller, local land areas.

5. America's Great Outdoors Initiative - This initiative seeks to reinvigorate our approach to conservation and reconnect Americans, especially young people, with the lands and waters that are used for farming, ranching, hunting and fishing, while families spend quality time together. "The America's Great Outdoors Initiative is born out of a conversation with the American people about what matters most to them about the places where they live, work, and play," Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar said. "It's about practical, common-sense ideas from the American people on how our natural, cultural, and historic resources can help us be a more competitive, stronger, and healthier nation. Together, we are adapting our conservation strategies to meet the challenges of today and empowering communities to protect and preserve our working lands and natural landscapes for generations to come."





Monitoring trees in Oregon

**2012** - 200th anniversary of the General Land Office and the 150th anniversary of the Homestead Act.



An environmental education program in Colorado

Today, the BLM benefits the national economy as well as the economies of local communities. Activities on BLM lands, such as energy production, mineral extraction, timber harvesting, grazing, and recreation, result in jobs and income from goods and services associated with public land resources. In 2010, the BLM's management of public lands contributed more than \$112 billion to the national economy and supported more than 500,000 American jobs.

[www.blm.gov/history](http://www.blm.gov/history)

## The BLM: A Sound Investment for America

\$40 billion yielded from the National System of Public Lands creating a \$103 billion dollar boost to the American economy.



The BLM strives to balance economic benefits to our Nation with the conservation of precious natural resources.



BLM's management of activities on public lands supported 507,750 jobs.



BLM lands yielded \$337 million worth of timber and created \$814 million in timber-related economic activity.



Grazing introduced \$310 million worth of feed and fiber into the market and created \$540 million worth of grazing-related economic activity.



BLM lands welcomed 58 million visitors.

Source:

<http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/info/socioeconomic.html>