

## Questions and Answers: The BLM's Proposed Landscape Approach

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### **What is a “landscape approach” for managing public lands?**

A landscape approach looks across large, connected geographic areas to more fully recognize natural resource conditions and trends, natural and human influences, and opportunities for resource conservation, restoration, and development. It seeks to identify important ecological values and patterns of environmental change that may not be evident when managing smaller, local land areas.

A landscape approach uses this broader understanding of the environment to inform, focus, and integrate the BLM's national and local resource management efforts. A landscape approach provides a framework for integrating science with management; for coordinating management efforts and directing resources where they are most needed; and for adapting management strategies and actions to changing conditions and new information. It also provides an important foundation for developing coordinated management strategies with partner agencies, stakeholders, and American Indian Tribes.

### **Why is the BLM developing a “landscape approach”?**

The BLM recognizes that the public lands are facing increasingly complex and widespread environmental challenges that transcend traditional management boundaries. These challenges include managing wildfire; controlling weeds and insect outbreaks; providing for energy development and urban growth; and addressing pervasive impacts from the effects of climate change. The BLM is developing a landscape-scale management approach to better understand these challenges and support balanced stewardship of the diverse natural resources of the public lands.

The BLM's proposed landscape approach also supports Secretary Salazar's key directions and priorities for the Department of the Interior (DOI). The Secretary has directed DOI agencies to consider climate change in planning and decision-making. He has also established the development of renewable energy as a DOI priority. These priorities challenge managers to consider natural resources from a broader viewpoint, and to integrate a landscape perspective with local management efforts.

### **How are landscapes defined?**

Landscapes can be defined or classified in many ways. To gain a broader perspective on ecological values and trends, the BLM is using a landscape classification called *ecoregions*. More specifically, the BLM is using *Level III ecoregions*, which have been classified by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation and the Environmental Protection Agency as fundamental geographic units for resource assessment and management. Examples of Level III ecoregions include the Sonoran Desert, Central Basin and Range, and Colorado Plateau.

### **How do ecoregions relate to the BLM's local field offices?**

Ecoregions span administrative boundaries and typically encompass areas much larger than those managed by individual BLM field offices. A representative BLM field office encompasses approximately 4 million acres. The ecoregions under assessment range in size from 11 million to 85 million acres. They typically encompass all or portions of several BLM field offices.

### **What is the role of the BLM's local field offices in a landscape management approach?**

The BLM's field offices maintain their central role in managing public lands. They continue to prepare land use plans, authorize land uses, conduct monitoring, and work with partners and stakeholders to develop and implement local management strategies. The broader perspective provided through a landscape approach will help inform, focus, and integrate these local management efforts.

### **Is a landscape approach something radically new?**

No. The BLM's proposed landscape approach builds on land management concepts and experiences that have been evolving for nearly three decades. BLM managers recognized in the early 1980's that western forests and rangelands were beset by widespread wildfires and weed and insect infestations that could no longer be managed effectively by local offices alone, or through traditional management practices. Scientists, land managers, and stakeholders have been working since then to understand these wide-ranging impacts, develop shared strategies, and implement collaborative management efforts. These collective experiences and partnerships underpin the BLM's proposed landscape approach.

### **What are the components of a landscape approach?**

The BLM's proposed landscape approach consists of five interconnected components. They are:

#### 1. Rapid Ecoregional Assessments (REAs)

REAs synthesize the best available information about resource conditions and trends within an ecoregion. They highlight and map areas of high ecological value, including important wildlife habitats and corridors, and gauge their potential risks from climate change, wildfires, invasive species, energy development, and urban growth. REAs also map areas that have substantial energy development potential, and relatively low ecological value, which could be suited for siting future energy development. In addition, REAs establish landscape-scale baseline ecological data to gauge the effect and effectiveness of future management actions.

The BLM has piloted REAs in three ecoregions: the Northern Great Basin, Wyoming Basin, and Chihuahuan Desert. REAs are being initiated in 2010 for seven additional ecoregions: the Central Basin and Range, Mojave Basin and Range, Sonoran Desert, Northwestern Plains, Middle Rockies, and Colorado Plateau in the continental U.S., and the Seward Peninsula-Nulato Hills-Kotzebue Lowlands in Alaska. These ecoregions vary in size from 11.5 million acres (Seward Peninsula ecoregion) to 88.3 million acres (Northwest Great Plains ecoregion).

#### 2. Ecoregional Direction

Ecoregional Direction will use the results of the REAs, with input from BLM staff, partner agencies, stakeholders, and Tribes, to develop key management strategies for the public lands within an ecoregion. Ecoregional Direction will identify strategies for conservation and development, including focal areas for conserving wildlife habitats and migration corridors, and focal areas for potential energy development and transmission. Ecoregional Direction will also provide a blueprint for coordinating and implementing these priorities at the BLM's state and field-office levels.

### 3. Field Implementation

Field implementation puts the management priorities and strategies identified in ecoregional direction into practice on-the-ground. This is accomplished by:

- Amending the BLM's land use plans, where necessary;
- Revising and implementing mitigation measures for authorized land uses, including Best Management Practices;
- Analyzing and implementing proposed projects and treatments, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA);
- Performing monitoring; and
- Developing budgets that focus and share management resources.

### 4. Monitoring for Adaptive Management

Consistent, high-quality monitoring information is essential for adaptive management. The BLM is modernizing its monitoring and mapping programs to meet this critical information requirement. The BLM's Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) Strategy will standardize data collection and retrieval so information is comparable over time, and can be readily accessed and shared. The goal of the AIM Strategy is to provide the information needed to understand resource conditions and trends, and to evaluate and refine implementation actions. In addition, the BLM is implementing its Geospatial Services Strategic Plan, which will provide the high quality mapping products needed to develop and support resource management strategies and decisions.

### 5. Science Integration

Science informs sound land management decision-making. The DOI is establishing eight regional Climate Science Centers to provide scientific information and tools to help land managers anticipate, monitor, and adapt to climate change impacts. In addition, a wide range of science research is conducted regularly on the public lands, in cooperation with universities and state and Federal agencies. The BLM's landscape approach is being designed to more closely link science research with public land management issues and needs, and to more fully integrate science information into resource planning and decision-making.

### **What is the role of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) in the BLM's landscape approach?**

LCCs are management-science partnerships composed of private, state, Tribal, and Federal representatives who will work toward a shared vision of landscape health and sustainability. The LCCs will facilitate collaboration, provide science information and tools needed for developing resource management strategies, and promote coordinated partnership actions at the landscape and local levels. The LCCs and the BLM's landscape approach are complementary efforts that will become more fully integrated as they progress.