



Bureau of Land Management

The public domain, lands owned by the Federal Government, once stretched from the Appalachian Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Of the 1.8 billion acres of public land originally acquired by the United States, two-thirds went to individuals, industries and the states. Of that remaining, much was set aside for national forests, wildlife refuges, national parks and monuments, and other public purposes.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) today administers what remains of the nation's once vast land holdings, approximately 272 million acres - about one-eighth of the nation. The Bureau of Land Management is charged with sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

The customers of the Bureau of Land Management are as varied as the diverse natural resources it manages. BLM provides services to a wide array of public land users, including: the mineral extraction industry; utility companies that use public lands for communication sites and other rights-of-way; the livestock industry; the timber industry; persons or groups interested in conservation and resource protection; and research scientists.

opportunities that are unique in their diversity, quantity, and quality, including National Conservation Areas, over 2,000 miles of the Wild and Scenic River System, and about 1,700 miles of National Trails. In addition, BLM manages 85,000 miles of streams containing trout, salmon, and other sport fish, enough to circle the Earth three and one-half times; more than 4 million acres of lakes and reservoirs; more than 470 developed recreation sites; and thousands of areas open to a wide variety of recreational uses.

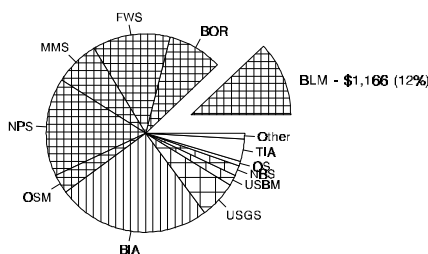
In 1994, recreational visits to public lands managed by BLM totaled over 58 million. BLM estimates that over 8.4 million hunting days are spent on the public land, 3 million visitor days are spent pursuing wildlife related activities such as bird watching, photography, and wildlife viewing, and over 7 million angler days are spent on BLM waters.

Lands and Renewable Resources Programs:

In addition, under BLM's land management programs:

- ▶ BLM manages livestock grazing on 165 million acres of public lands. About 18,800 ranchers and farmers graze livestock on BLM-administered lands. About 90 percent of these permittees have small (less than 100 head) or medium (100 to 500 head) livestock operations.
- ▶ BLM manages wildlife habitat for more than 3,000 species, including 140 threatened or endangered plant and animal species. BLM manages habitat for one out of every five big game animals in the United States, including caribou, brown and grizzly bears, desert bighorn sheep, moose, mule deer and antelope.

FY 1994 BLM Budget Authority
(\$ in millions)



Total DOI Budget Authority - \$9,663

The Public Lands also offer recreational

and timber fees and other fees for a total of about \$1.3 billion. Oil and gas royalties are collected by the Minerals Management Service acting as agent for the Federal Government. Production from Federal coal leases amounts to over 245 million tons which generates about \$300 million in Federal royalties; 50 percent of this is returned to the states. Major producers include Wyoming and Montana.

For many communities in the West, public lands continue to be the only source for sand, gravel, and other common stone, which are sold by BLM. The BLM also manages nonenergy minerals through leasing and mining claims programs. About 50 percent of the nation's potash, 45 percent of its sodium compounds, and 70 percent of its lead are produced from public lands.

Wildland Firefighting Programs: The Department's wildland firefighting programs are funded and coordinated through the BLM. The Department is committed to providing adequate and reliable funding for our wildland firefighting efforts. The Department works closely with the U.S. Forest Service, state, and local governments to

coordinate and prioritize this important mission. The Interagency Fire Coordination Center in Boise, Idaho, serves as the nerve center for this effort.

Forest Plan: BLM remains a key participant in the President's Forest Plan for the Pacific Northwest. A highlight of the plan is the unique Jobs in the Woods program which provides environmental benefits at the same time it provides much needed job and income opportunities for families with strong ties to the land and rural lifestyles. BLM estimates it will create 500 "full year jobs" in 1996 in hard-hit rural communities, primarily in western Oregon.

Payments in Lieu of Taxes: The BLM administers the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program which compensates local government units for losses to their real property tax base due to Federal lands within their boundaries. Payments received under the program may be used for any governmental purpose, including police and fire protection, school busing, or road maintenance.



Fog on Coos River in the Coos River Resource Area (Coos Bay District, Oregon).

Wild Fire

Just north of Interstate 70 in the Colorado Rockies rise the now charred slopes of Storm King Mountain. There, at 4 p.m. on July 6, 1994, a wall of flame 300 feet high swept uphill, taking the lives of 14 fire fighters who stood in its path. The mountain seems an unlikely place for such a conflagration. Its unburned flanks are covered only with scraggly patches of pinion-juniper and Gambel oak, rooted in open expanses of red rock and dirt.

Across the entire Western landscape, from Mexico to the Canadian border, scrub trees are taking over: junipers advance across lowland plains; doghair ponderosa fill gaps in the highland forests; spruce and fir crowd out aspen groves. The reason for this change is that we have systematically removed the natural flame. Just as we wiped out the wolf that preyed on weak, sick and overpopulated herds, we have eliminated the frequent, light-burning fire cycles that used to thin the forests of young trees, kill off the spreading juniper seedlings and hold brush in check. Paradoxically, as fire exclusion escalates, wildfires fight back with increasing ferocity. In the absence of fire, ground fuel accumulates and crowded forests become more susceptible to disease and insect damage. When lightning inevitably strikes, the odds are much higher that it will flare up faster, burn hotter and higher, crown into the big trees and decimate entire forests in what professionals call a "stand replacing fire." These intense, densely-fueled wildfires are also increasingly expensive, and unpredictable, to fight.

The only way to break this vicious cycle is to put controlled fire back onto the land. We must apply the torch to recreate the prehistoric cycles of light burning where ground fires moved swiftly across the land, consuming brush and accumulated ground fuel, pruning out thickets and maintaining healthy stands of forests. For many years the public has seen only the risks of fire, not the benefits. When a million acres of Yellowstone burned in 1988, the initial public response was highly negative. But when visitors saw the miraculous cycle of renewal -- purple fields of blooming fireweed and slopes greening with lodgepole seedlings -- attitudes began to change. Yellowstone taught us -- in a most spectacular and instructive setting -- that fires are a natural and necessary part of the ecological succession.

A comprehensive movement that puts prescribed fire back onto the landscape, that increases the health and productivity of the land, and that reduces the risks and destruction of wildfires that do occur, would be a lasting memorial to the brave firefighters who lost their lives during the summer of 1994.



BLM fire crew clearing Chapparal for fire break before a prescribed burn (Hualapai Mountains, Kingman, Arizona).