

**DISCUSSION PAPER**  
**Bureau of Land Management**  
**Treasured Landscapes**

**Our Vision, Our Values**

**I. Introduction -- BLM's Vision for Treasured Landscapes in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Of the 264 million acres under BLM management, some 130- to 140-million acres are worthy of consideration as treasured lands. These areas, roughly equivalent in size to Colorado and Wyoming combined, are valuable for their unspoiled beauty; the critical role they play in habitat conservation; their historical, cultural, and paleontological significance; and their importance in maintaining the proper functioning of the larger ecosystems in which they exist.

In order to preserve these treasured landscapes for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the BLM proposes to manage them not as individual parcels, but as components of larger landscapes, ecosystems, airsheds, and watersheds. We now know that these large-scale ecosystems, watersheds, airsheds, and migratory pathways exist and function only at their natural scales, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. Therefore, in order to facilitate the transition from the current land management system, which is based on jurisdictional boundaries, to a modern landscape-level management system, the BLM proposes to "designate, rationalize, and manage-at-scale" its treasured landscape holdings.

Over the next 25 years, the BLM intends to: (1) finalize appropriate conservation designations and fully account for the ecosystem-services values of its lands; (2) rationalize and consolidate its fragmented landholdings; and (3) commit to planning and allocating resources and resource uses and at their natural scales, in effective coordination with other Federal, State, and Tribal governments. The BLM believes that together, the three components of this vision will allow us to utilize 21<sup>st</sup> century science to preserve our celebrated assets and guarantee that our treasured landscapes will be conserved for the enjoyment of future generations.

To achieve our Treasured Landscape objectives, the BLM will need to enlist the aid of the administration and Congress to ensure that we possess both the legal tools and financial means to make our vision of integrated landscape-level management a reality.

**II. Background -- BLM's Treasured Lands: Vast, Varied, and Vital**

The BLM's lands include fragile ecosystems essential to rare animal and plant species, cultural resources that date back to the beginning of America's Native populations, stunning paleontological resources that increase our understanding of the natural world, breathtaking vistas and recreational areas, and nationally significant historic sites and trails that tell the story of our growing Nation.

The bulk of the BLM's existing treasured lands have been arrayed, by Presidential declaration, legislative enactment, or administrative management, into four separate management categories, together amounting to nearly 130-million acres—about half of BLM's total land portfolio:

- **The National Landscape Conservation System:** The BLM's transition to public land management on a landscape scale began a decade ago when then-Secretary Babbitt created America's newest, permanently protected collection of public lands—the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). By statute, the NLCS now consists of all BLM-managed National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Outstanding Natural Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Scenic and Historic Trails, and Conservation Lands within the California Desert—a set of public lands together comprising almost 27 million acres. These lands have been designated by Congress or Presidential proclamation to be specially managed to enhance their conservation values, while allowing for the continuation of certain multiple uses. The mission of the NLCS is to conserve, protect, and restore, for present and future generations, the nationally significant landscapes that have been recognized for their outstanding archaeological, geological, cultural, ecological, wilderness, recreation, and scientific values.
- **Special Areas identified and designated through the land use planning process:** Outside the NLCS, BLM land-use plans have designated about 75 million additional acres for the primary purpose of conservation and recreation. These areas include Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Special Recreation Management Areas, Globally Important Bird Areas, Significant Caves, Research Natural Areas, National Natural Landmarks, and others.
- **Areas that provide critical habitat for listed and sensitive wildlife and plant species:** Further, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated 25-million acres of BLM lands (not included in either of the two previous categories) as critical habitat for listed and sensitive wildlife and plant species.
- **Wild Horse Preserves:** Finally, as a result of the Secretary's October 2009 proposal to create a sustainable wild horse program, the BLM now has the opportunity to acquire preserves in the Midwest or East as part of the BLM's Treasured Landscapes initiative. America's iconic wild horses are powerful national symbols of the West, and adding federally owned wild-horse preserves to the BLM's Treasured Landscapes portfolio will provide an opportunity to expand appreciation of the BLM's conservation mission to new areas.

Because the BLM's vast landholdings hold such great promise for the Department's ambitious conservation objectives, the BLM's landscape-level preservation efforts should play a central role in the Department's Treasured Landscapes agenda.

### III. The Vision: A Well-Managed System of Treasured and Protected Lands

The BLM believes that the successful management of its treasured landscapes over the next twenty-five years will require BLM to undertake three initiatives:

- First, so that lands are placed in appropriate management regimes and land-use decisions are well-informed, the BLM should ensure that its existing landholdings have received appropriate conservation designations and that the ecosystem-service values of its lands (including benefits such as carbon sequestration and air and water purification) have been adequately inventoried and considered.
- Second, to allow for more effective landscape-scale management, the BLM should aim to rationalize its land holdings by eliminating existing “checkerboard” land-holding patterns where possible, and by acquiring parcels adjacent to its current holdings, if important to preserve ecosystem integrity.
- Third, to ensure that BLM’s specific land-use decisions are properly situated in their broader contexts, the BLM should commit to managing its consolidated and expanded landholdings at their natural scales, and to coordinating with other federal, state, and tribal land owners for the purposes of maintaining healthy wildlife populations, ecosystems, airsheds, watersheds, and riparian areas.

**A. Completing Conservation Designations and Accounting for Ecosystem-Service Values: Expanding the NLCS, Designating New National Monuments, and Managing for Conservation in the Land-Use Planning Process.**

The first component of BLM’s treasured landscapes vision would ensure that the special lands already in BLM’s ownership are managed under the appropriately protective management regime.

BLM-managed public lands include rugged mountains, wild deserts, and America’s last vestiges of large, untamed landscapes. These landscapes first captured the pioneer spirit and cultivated America’s romantic ideals of the Wild West. In order to expand this network of treasured lands to include the diversity of landscapes currently managed by the BLM and to protect world-class ecological and cultural resources, the BLM believes that lands especially deserving of protection should be placed in the National Landscape Conservation System; that the administration should consider designating significant and immediately threatened lands as national monuments; and that the BLM’s land-use planning process should properly account for ecosystem-service values and manage for conservation values.

To that end, the BLM proposes that the Administration:

- I. Support Congressional efforts to expand the NLCS legislatively through the designation of new National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Historic Trails. Designation efforts should not be focused solely in the West, but should also include areas in the rest of the country that warrant such protection.

2. Consider use of the Antiquities Act to set aside new National Monuments where there are immediate threats to nationally significant natural or cultural resources on lands deserving NLCS status. However, the BLM recognizes that public support and acceptance of preservation status is best achieved when the public has an opportunity to participate in a land-use-planning or legislative process.
3. Use the BLM's land-use planning process to manage for conservation values. This will allow the BLM to protect lands that, while ineligible for Monument designation and/or unlikely to receive legislative protection in the near term, are nevertheless worthy of conservation.

The BLM estimates that approximately 35 million acres of its current land holdings, all of which have been identified by the public as worthy of special protection, should be considered for a new and/or heightened conservation designation.

1. **Supporting Congressional Expansion of the NLCS through Legislation Designating New Wilderness or National Conservation Areas, and Resolving the Status of BLM's existing Wilderness Study Areas.**

The BLM believes that the Secretary's Treasured Landscape initiative would benefit greatly from resolution of long-standing issues relating to wilderness designations on BLM-managed public land. Currently, the BLM manages more than 545 areas, amounting to nearly 12.7 million acres, that it has identified as potentially appropriate for wilderness designation. There are strongly held opinions on each side as to whether these lands, now termed "Wilderness Study Areas," should ultimately be designated as Wilderness or released for other uses. This contentious debate will continue until Congress makes a final determination as to the permanent status of these lands.

Further, the BLM recommends looking beyond its Wilderness Study Areas and building on the Secretary's expressed interest in the model of local leadership and cooperation exemplified in the recent congressional designations of Dominguez-Escalante National Monument in Colorado; Wilderness and Wild and Scenic rivers in Idaho; and National Conservation Areas, Wilderness, and Wild and Scenic Rivers in Utah. There are currently a number of locally driven proposals that would benefit from the Administration's support, including a proposal to designate New Mexico's Rio Grande del Norte as a National Conservation Area.

As a critical part of the BLM's conservation agenda, the BLM proposes working closely with the Administration and Congress to determine whether other public lands are suitable for management as National Conservation Areas. Attachment 3 contains a list of BLM-managed lands that may be appropriate for Wilderness or National Conservation Area designation.

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2. **Considering New National Monument Designations under the Antiquities Act**

Should the legislative process not prove fruitful, or if a nationally significant natural or cultural land resource were to come under threat of imminent harm, BLM would recommend that the Administration consider using the Antiquities Act to designate new National Monuments by Presidential Proclamation.

The Antiquities Act allows the President to act quickly and decisively in defense of our natural and cultural treasures. Since President Theodore Roosevelt first used the Act, 15 Presidents have exercised their authority to protect nationally important places, including the Grand Tetons, Carlsbad Caverns, Mount Olympus (now Olympia National Park), Arizona's Petrified Forest, and Alaska's Denali.

For much of the history of the Act, lands designated as National Monuments were taken from the BLM and entrusted to the National Park Service. This changed in 1996, when President Clinton gave management jurisdiction over the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument to the BLM, reflecting a growing understanding that park-style management was not necessarily appropriate for all conservation lands. Fourteen of the 22 National Monuments created or expanded by President Clinton – totaling more than 4 million acres – remained under BLM stewardship. Today, these lands form the heart of the NLCS. BLM's management of these areas, without the trappings of visitor centers and other man-made improvements, has met with wide public support. These lands symbolize the American spirit, and their remoteness and solitude remain poignant reminders of a bygone era.

Attachment 4 contains a list of lands that may be appropriate for designation under the Antiquities Act.

**3. Utilizing the Land-Use Planning Process to Account for Ecosystem-Service Values and to Protect Lands that are Ineligible for Monument Designation.**

The final aspect of the first component of BLM's Treasured Landscapes vision recognizes that new conservation designations should not be the only – nor, perhaps, even the primary – means of managing for conservation on BLM's public lands. To that end, BLM also recommends emphasizing conservation values in its land-use planning process, with particular attention focused on two considerations: (a) accounting for the ecosystem-service values of BLM lands, and (b) the special legal context of conservation management in Wyoming and Alaska.

**a. Accounting for Ecosystem-Service Values in the Land-Use Planning Process.**

Consumptive or ground-disturbing uses of public lands often yield benefits that are readily quantifiable—BLM's timber-sale plans, for example, may be expected to yield a certain number of board feet, contribute to the creation of a definite number of jobs, and provide local communities with an estimable amount of economic activity. By contrast, non-consumptive and conserving uses of public lands have not historically been thought to yield values that are as readily quantifiable.

The modern interest in accounting for the "ecosystem services" value of lands aims to regress this imbalance. Better accounting for the value of public lands left in a condition closer to the land's natural state—whether measured in the amount of carbon sequestered by a stand of trees or native grasslands, by the economic value to local communities of undisturbed ecosystems, natural purification of air or water, or by the number of jobs retained as a result of recreational opportunities saved in an area closed to development—is designed to allow land-use decisionmakers to act with a fuller knowledge of the trade-offs involved in the choice to conserve an existing landscape, or permit new development.

Appreciating the conservation component of its multiple-use mission, the BLM proposes for its land-use planning process a new commitment to accounting for the value of the services provided by conserved ecosystems.

**b. The Special Circumstance of Wyoming and Alaska**

Last, it merits special mention that Congress has limited the President's authority to designate new national monuments in Wyoming and Alaska. Nevertheless, there are several landscapes in Wyoming and Alaska that contain critical ecological and cultural resources that deserve special attention and possibly enhanced protections.

The BLM therefore particularly proposes that the Administration use the BLM's land-use planning process to identify the management actions, including possible mineral withdrawals, necessary to protect sensitive resources in Wyoming and Alaska. The BLM also recommends that the Administration begin a dialogue with Congress to encourage the conservation of these areas.

Attachment 5 contains a list of areas that, though they are ineligible for Monument designation, merit protection.

**B. Rationalizing BLM's Fragmented Lands: Consolidating the BLM's Checkboard-Pattern Landholdings and Enabling Landscape-Scale Ecosystem Management By Acquiring New Lands and Divesting Parcels Identified for Disposal**

The second component of BLM's Treasured-Landscapes vision would involve changing the composition of BLM's public-lands portfolio.

The BLM manages what remains of the United States' once consolidated public domain. For much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the public domain passed into private ownership (or management by other Federal agencies) under public land laws that made no attempt to preserve ecosystem integrity. In some cases, large swaths of land were patented to railroad companies in a checkerboard pattern. The resulting pattern of alternating land tenures creates extreme management difficulties, habitat fragmentation and, increasingly, user conflicts. In addition, there are today roughly 128,800 acres of inholdings in BLM-managed National Conservation Areas (excluding the California Desert) and 283,857 acres of inholdings in BLM-Managed National Monuments.

As the second component of its Treasured Landscape initiative, the BLM proposes to rationalize its existing public land holdings. Through consolidation of its protected land base and reduced fragmentation, the BLM will be better able to mitigate adverse impacts on wildlife habitat, recreation, vegetation, cultural resources, and other values. To that end, the BLM will (1) pursue a program of land consolidation to address its checkerboarded lands—particularly in Nevada, Oregon, California, Wyoming, and Utah, where the problem is most acute, (2) seek to acquire properties adjacent to its current holdings, if needed to preserve ecosystem integrity, and (3) attempt to divest itself of the scattered and low-value landholdings that it has identified for disposal through a land-use planning process.

To achieve these objectives, the BLM will rely on its land-exchange and land-acquisition programs and depend on the availability and vitality of three critical management tools: (1) the Land and Water Conservation Fund, (2) the Federal Land Transfer Facilitation Act; and (3) a new program of renewable energy offsets.

#### 4. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides a primary means for BLM to acquire lands worthy of long-term protection. LWCF funds may be used to acquire privately owned lands and waters that are adjacent to or within BLM special areas, including National Conservation Areas, National Historic and Scenic Trails, National Wild and Scenic River corridors, Wilderness, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and Special Recreation Management Areas.

The President's budget for 2010 includes a total of \$419.9 million for LWCF programs, including \$25 million for BLM; \$65 million for USFWS; \$68 million for NPS; and \$12.1 million for appraisal services.

In FY 2010, the BLM requested LWCF funding to acquire 52,500 acres in 37 areas, with an estimated value of \$58 million. In FY 2011, the BLM requested LWCF funding to acquire 47,100 acres in 40 areas, with an estimated value of \$82 million. The outyear funding estimates for LWCF needs are based on a number of recent land acquisition opportunities. The majority of these monies would be used to acquire land for the NLCS and other BLM Treasured Landscapes. See Attachment 1 for more detailed LWCF funding information.

#### 5. The Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA)

The BLM is the lead agency for administering the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA). Prior to the passage of FLTFA, funds generated by BLM land sales were deposited directly into the U.S. Treasury, providing no direct conservation value to the nation.

FLTFA established the Federal Land Disposal Account that allows the BLM to sell lands with low conservation values to generate funds for the purchase of lands with high conservation