

## **Chapter Introduction: Public Land Management**

The Bureau of Land Management is a federal agency responsible for the management of more than 258 million acres of public land across the nation. There are more than 15 million acres of public land in Oregon managed by the BLM. The BLM works in partnership with The Nature Conservancy to manage the Table Rocks. In 1976 Congress enacted the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), recognizing land has many uses and values, including ecological, cultural, historical, recreational, and economical through the extraction of resources. With the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Congress recognized the value of the remaining public land and decided it would remain in public ownership and managed for “multiple uses.” This term is defined as the “management of 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.” Thus, the BLM has the challenging responsibility of balancing the various uses and values of public lands between existing human and ecological needs, and ensuring that these values will be preserved for future generations. The following gives a brief description of how the public lands in southwestern Oregon are managed for ecological health, economical benefits, and aesthetic values.

### **Multiple Uses of Public Lands:**

#### **Resource Extraction:**

##### **Timber**

Timber harvesting is the most economically significant resource management action on BLM managed lands in Oregon. The most common and important timber species is Douglas-fir. All of us rely on the resources trees provide, which include building materials and paper, among many things. In western Oregon, the BLM manages 2.2 million acres of forested land. The Northwest Forest Plan of 1994 prescribes that these lands be managed to provide a stable, sustainable supply of timber while also providing habitat for fish, wildlife, and plants. To accomplish this goal, lands are allocated to provide for different resource programs. Approximately twenty-five percent of BLM managed lands in western Oregon are available for varying levels of timber harvest. The BLM uses timber harvest not only as an economical resource but also as a management tool to enhance ecosystem health and to maximize the growth potential of conifer trees. For example, dense stands are thinned to offset the effects of fire suppression, reduce the risk of wildfires, and to allow fewer trees to grow faster, and bigger. No matter how responsibly timber harvesting is approached, there are environmental impacts that may have either short-term or long-term effects on other resource values. When this occurs significant efforts are made to minimize these effects. One of the greatest issues foresters face involves the impacts of developing and managing logging roads. For example, it is likely that the following impacts will occur when a logging road is built: soil compaction, soil erosion, removal of vegetation, loss of habitat, and habitat fragmentation. In order to address these effects, the following mitigation measures may include: ripping, or decompacting the road surface following use; mulching, grass seeding, installation of water dips or culverts to slow and divert water flow; gating to minimize wildlife

disturbance; road placement to avoid sensitive plant or animal species; and seasonal log hauling restrictions to minimize road damage.

### **Mining**

Most minerals are extracted from the earth through the process of mining. Some examples of industrial minerals that are commonly extracted are rock, sand, base metals such as copper, lead, zinc, and precious metals such as gold and silver. Mining takes place either on the surface at a rock pit or underground in tunnels. Historically both surface and underground gold mining took place in southwestern Oregon. Currently most gold mining is recreational and is done with small suction dredges. Today, surface mining of rock is by far the most common form of mineral resource extraction that occurs on BLM lands. Roads, sidewalks, buildings, and yards contain rock mined from BLM quarries. Historically, mining processes caused an immense amount of environmental damage. Heavy metals, acids, and chemicals were leached into the ground and waterways, and dredging caused massive erosion that choked streams and rivers with sediment. Currently, mining on public land is heavily regulated and monitored to ensure that minimal environmental degradation occurs. Mining companies need to submit plans and the BLM is required to conduct an environmental analysis to assess what impacts may occur if the plan goes through.

### **Grazing**

The regulated grazing of livestock on public lands has been going on since before the BLM existed! In 1934, Theodore Roosevelt signed the Taylor Grazing Act, which set the rules for governing livestock on public lands, and 12 years later (July 16, 1946), the Grazing Service and the General Land Office merged to form the Bureau of Land Management.

Grazing can have beneficial impacts on the land if properly managed. Livestock can chisel up the soil and allow for better rainfall penetration; they scatter seed to replenish perennial grass populations; their grazing removes lighter vegetation to reduce wildfire fuels; they reduce competing vegetation in forested areas so that trees have more room to grow; and if grazed at the proper time they can help reduce noxious weed populations. In the past, large ungulates (bison) roamed much of our public lands providing these ecological benefits that livestock currently provide.

However, if grazing goes unregulated or is misused, livestock (as well as other herbivores) can overgraze rangelands, exposing them to wind and water erosion. Livestock can devastate streams and stream banks, compromise fish habitat by adding sediment and waste to the water, and increase the spread of noxious weed seeds if allowed to graze in the wrong areas.

### **Scenic and Aesthetic Value:**

BLM lands in southwestern Oregon are also valuable for their scenic and aesthetic qualities. Many residents of the region place an immeasurable value on the natural beauty of the landscape. We can hardly think of southwestern Oregon without envisioning such scenic sites as Crater Lake, Mount McLoughlin, the Table Rocks, or beautiful landscapes such as sunlit oak woodlands, mystic old-growth forests, or mountain meadows speckled

with wildflowers. The natural wonders and ecological integrity of southern Oregon draws visitors from around the world, making tourism the state's third largest industry.

### **Recreation:**

Outdoor recreation is a vital way for people to develop an appreciation and connection to nature. Hiking, camping, mountain biking, skiing, off-highway vehicle use, hunting, and fishing are all popular activities that take place on our public lands. Southwestern Oregon offers a rich abundance of recreational activities and is a popular tourist location because of these rich opportunities. Recreation activities have many positive effects such as aiding in mental, physical, and spiritual health. They also fulfill the desire to connect with nature and experience the outdoors. When practiced responsibly, these activities are a wonderful opportunity for people to appreciate and value nature. However, these activities can also have negative ecological effects. Trails can fragment habitat and the human presence in the forest can disturb sensitive wildlife species. Noxious weed seeds can inadvertently be spread through a variety of ways including hitching rides on pet fur or pant legs. Improper use of off-highway vehicles in non-designated trails or in riparian areas can cause erosion and destroy fish habitat. It is important for all users of our public lands to be responsible by following a "Leave No Trace" ethic, causing as little disturbance to nature as possible, and making sure to pack out everything they pack in.

### **Cultural Resources:**

Public lands contain important archaeological sites and other links to our region's cultural past. The archaeological and historic sites the BLM manages are known as cultural resources. Over 10,300 cultural resource sites, including campsites, village sites, rock art sites, lighthouses, ranches, and homesteads, have been identified on BLM lands nationwide. Such resources give us clues to what life was like for the people that lived here hundreds or thousands of years ago. Some sites are important for historical reference as well as contemporary cultural significance. The Table Rocks, for example, are sacred sites to the Takelma people, and figure prominently in Takelma creation stories. These cultural resource sites are landmarks that connect us with our history and help foster a sense of regional identity.

### **Education:**

Many sites on BLM lands are valuable as teaching tools. The Table Rocks are a premier example, providing a unique educational opportunity for the public and students from throughout the Rogue Valley. The Table Rocks are centrally located in the Valley, and the diversity of habitat types and remarkable richness of plant and animal species make the Table Rocks an ideal setting to teach ecological themes. They are also a culturally important site for the Native American people of the region as well as a geologically unique landmark, offering the opportunity to discuss the geological processes which formed them. Their combination of accessibility, ecological richness, geological interest, cultural significance, and sheer beauty adds to the richness of our region and makes the Table Rocks a precious educational resource. Southwestern Oregon is one of the most biologically diverse areas in the country. It's geological history, species richness, cultural

history, and topographic diversity provides the public with endless educational opportunities in the natural and social sciences.

**Ecological Value:**

The natural world has intrinsic ecological value of its own. To preserve the natural richness of our region, the BLM maintains large areas of wildlands where ecological values take precedence. In these areas, ecosystem processes can function intact, without human disturbance, and rare and sensitive organisms are protected. The BLM manages specially designated sites such as National Conservation Areas, National Monuments, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and Wilderness Areas primarily for their ecological values, and therefore places higher restrictions upon the use of these areas. Under the multiple uses mandate, however, ecological values are taken into account even on lands from which resources are extracted. For example, endangered species and riparian areas are protected on all public lands.