



Frequently Asked Questions

Outdoor Recreation and the Proposed Public Lands Rule

To ensure long-term landscape health and ecosystem resilience, the [proposed Public Lands Rule](#) would provide a framework for the BLM to protect intact landscapes, restore degraded habitat, and make wise management decisions based on science and data. This framework supports recreation on public lands. As more Americans visit and explore our public lands, the proposed rule would help ensure current and future generations can enjoy quality outdoor recreation experiences and that BLM has the tools to balance sustainable recreation management and other multiple uses.

How would the proposed Public Lands Rule benefit outdoor recreation?

Outdoor recreation is dependent on good stewards and healthy public lands and waters. People visit public lands to hike, hunt, fish, bike, climb, camp, boat and experience the sights and sounds of nature. All of these activities rely on resilient ecosystems that support scenic landscapes, abundant wildlife, and clean air and water. Climate change is having a particular impact on outdoor recreation through drought and catastrophic wildfire, emphasizing the need for resilient public lands that can continue to provide recreation opportunities in a changing future.

In addition to protecting and maintaining resilient landscapes that provide quality outdoor recreation experiences, the proposed rule would prioritize restoration of degraded lands and waters. Restoration efforts can enhance recreation experiences on public lands and provide opportunities for local communities to develop sustainable recreation activities.

Ensuring public lands are conserved for public use and enjoyment will help Americans connect with their public lands and will ensure the local communities and economies that rely on outdoor recreation continue to thrive.

Can outdoor recreation occur on public lands that are managed for conservation?

Yes! Sustainable recreation is compatible with conservation, and in fact public lands that are managed for conservation provide some of the most sought-after recreation opportunities. The proposed rule would help expand outstanding opportunities for recreation by giving the BLM needed tools and guidance to prioritize conservation management of highly valued public lands. By formally recognizing conservation as a multiple use on par with other uses such as recreation, the BLM would not reduce the amount of land available for recreation but rather ensure that all of the important values and resources of our public lands are given the management attention they deserve.

How would the proposed rule affect BLM's management of outdoor recreation activities?

The proposed rule does not include specific direction for recreation management, and it would not change plans, policies or programs governing recreation activities on public lands. In fact, the BLM is

advancing opportunities for responsible, resilient, and sustainable recreation on America's public lands. As the BLM implements the proposed regulations after they are finalized, recreation management decisions would incorporate the objectives and principles set forth in the rule to ensure landscape health and ecosystem resilience. Sustainable recreation is compatible with these objectives and principles, and it is anticipated that the BLM would over time improve recreation management to increase its sustainability under the proposed rule.

The rule would not prescribe any recreation uses or decisions; recreation management would still be determined at the local level through land management planning, trail development projects and place-based plans.

Would the proposed rule foreclose development of new recreation opportunities?

No, the proposed rule would not prohibit development of new recreation trails or uses. The Public Lands Rule is not intended to prevent or decrease outdoor recreation use – rather it would ensure that recreation on public lands can grow sustainably and benefit from the conservation of healthy lands and waters. The proposed rule would encourage thoughtful management to ensure all types of outdoor recreation experiences can be enjoyed by current and future generations.

What is conservation leasing, and what does it mean for recreation?

Conservation leases are a mechanism included in the proposed rule that can be used to carry out durable restoration and mitigation on BLM-managed public lands. The proposed rule would allow conservation leases to be used only for these two purposes: restoration and compensatory mitigation. Consistent with how the BLM promotes and administers other uses, conservation leases would be a tool available to entities seeking to restore public lands or provide mitigation for an action elsewhere on the public lands. A conservation lease would be proposed for one of these two uses by a third party; the proposed rule does not contemplate the BLM requiring use of conservation leases.

Conservation leases would not prevent public access to leased lands, and specifically would not foreclose recreation use. Lands leased for conservation would continue to be accessible to the public for recreation activities, and would continue to be available for permitted recreation uses such as commercial outfitters and guides. On occasion, some public lands could be temporarily closed to public access for purposes authorized by conservation leases, such as restoration activities or habitat improvements. However, such closures would only be temporary (short term) and intended to support the restoration action taking root. In general, public lands leased for conservation purposes under the proposed rule would continue to be open to public use.

Conservation leases could be used to support outdoor recreation by providing a tool for restoring recreation areas and for mitigating impacts to recreation caused by development or overuse. It is anticipated that recreation advocates and permittees would at times acquire conservation leases to conduct restoration activities that would benefit recreation opportunities, as a lease would help secure their investment in the landscape. Conservation leases can also be used for compensatory mitigation – compensating for the loss of resources that cannot be avoided, such as recreation areas being impacted by energy development. For example, through a conservation lease, the loss of a recreation

resource on public lands could be offset by protecting or developing a recreation resource elsewhere on public lands.

Conservation lease applications would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, specific to a restoration or mitigation goal, and considered in the context of other potential uses on the landscape, such as recreation. The BLM would then determine whether a conservation lease would be appropriate in each individual situation. Conservation leases would not disturb existing authorizations, valid existing rights, or state or Tribal land use management. If the proposed activities in a conservation lease would conflict with existing authorizations, then the conservation lease could not be issued on those particular lands. In every case, the proposed rule contemplates that these leases would be issued for discrete areas on a time-limited basis.

What is intactness, and what does it mean for recreation?

Intact landscapes are defined in the proposed rule as unfragmented ecosystems free of local conditions that could permanently or significantly disrupt, impair, or degrade the landscape's structure or ecosystem resilience, and that are large enough to maintain native biological diversity, including viable populations of wide-ranging species. Intact landscapes protect and connect important wildlife habitat, provide critical ecosystem functions, and increase resilience of lands and waters – and are some of the most valued landscapes for outdoor recreation.

Under the proposed rule, the BLM would identify intact landscapes and make decisions about how best to manage each of them through the land use planning process, with community and stakeholder engagement and public comment. In doing so, the BLM would consider a range of potential uses in accordance with its multiple-use management approach, as well as the best available scientific information. Outdoor recreation is compatible with protection of intact landscapes, and these areas may often be prioritized for providing high quality and sustainable recreation opportunities.

What are Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and what do they mean for recreation?

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) are a tool specific to the BLM as directed in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. ACECs are areas on public lands where special management attention is needed to protect important natural, cultural, and scenic resources. The BLM currently inventories, evaluates, and designates ACECs as part of the land use planning process with public input, and makes specific management decisions for each ACEC. These management decisions include what types of recreation activities are allowed in individual ACECs, and may determine trails and routes that are open to public use.

The proposed rule would not make any major changes to BLM's existing practices in designating ACECs; rather it would provide consistent and clear direction on the practice. It would not make decisions on recreation management or uses in ACECs, as these decisions would continue to be made through local planning processes with opportunities for public comment and stakeholder engagement. The proposed rule would codify ACEC evaluation and designation procedures in regulation, providing more cohesive direction and consistency to the process. It would also clarify that ecosystem resilience, including intact landscapes and habitat connectivity, can be a purpose for designating and managing ACECs.