



For America's Heritage

# THE PUBLIC LANDS Monitor

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## EARLY ALERT – 2026 PLF ANNUAL MEETING SEPTEMBER 15 & 16, 2026

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Save the date and mark your calendar! This year's Annual Meeting will be held in Phoenix, Arizona, on September 15 and 16, 2026. The theme for this year's meeting is "Urban Interface and Public Land Management". The General meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 15. The Banquet, awards ceremony, silent auction, and raffle will take place on Tuesday evening. The Board of Directors meeting will be held on September 16. As in the past, the silent auction and raffle will help support the George Lea Founder's Scholarship Fund. So, be thinking about what you can contribute.

A block of rooms has been reserved at the Holiday Inn Express Phoenix Airport, 3401 E. University Drive, Phoenix, Arizona. The room rate for a King bed or two Queen beds is \$119.00 per night, plus local taxes and fees. These rates are also offered, based on availability, for three days before and three days after the meeting dates. The hotel amenities include complimentary breakfast, complimentary parking, complimentary 24-hour airport shuttle service, complimentary WiFi, and a refrigerator, microwave and safe included in all rooms. Please make your reservations at our group rate ("Public Lands Foundation") by contacting Holiday Inn Express at 602-453-9900. An online registration form will also be posted on the PLF website. Your reservations must be made by August 19, 2026.



Ironwood Forest NM, AZ

More information will be provided in the next edition of the *Monitor*. Don't forget to mark your calendar and reserve the date. We look forward to seeing you in Phoenix in September. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact Beau McClure at [vpops@publicland.org](mailto:vpops@publicland.org) or by phone at 623-587-7883.

The Public Lands Foundation advocates and works for the retention of America's Public Lands in public hands professionally and sustainably managed for responsible common use and enjoyment.

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

I hope you are all well and looking forward to spring. For those who live in the northeast, I am sure it could not come quickly enough. In the west, it has been a very dry, warm, and windy winter. I am hoping that April will bring with it some much needed moisture for this part of the country.



Mary Jo Rugwell

I am pleased to announce that Brian Amme has agreed to serve as the Nevada State Representative on the Public Lands Foundation Board. That role has been vacant for some time, so it is great to get it filled again. We are still seeking a State Representative for New Mexico. If you know anyone who is interested, please encourage them to contact me at [mrugwell@publicland.org](mailto:mrugwell@publicland.org).

I hope that you were able to order some of the PLF-branded merchandise that Ray Brady found a partner to produce (thanks also to Don Simpson for the contact). I ordered t-shirts for my daughter's family and a sweatshirt for myself. They are excellent quality and the purchases help raise funds for the PLF. Purchases can continue to be made through the vendor website at [bonfire.com/store/public-lands-foundation](https://bonfire.com/store/public-lands-foundation).

Every edition of *The Monitor* has a section for Letters to the Editor. I would like to encourage more

members to submit items for publication as it is always helpful to know what our members are thinking. Please consider authoring a letter on any public lands topic that interests you to help inform us all. Letters to the Editor can be submitted to [rbrady@publicland.org](mailto:rbrady@publicland.org).

As we know, there was a literal flood of Bureau of Land Management employee retirements and resignations in 2025. Unfortunately, the PLF has not seen a commensurate increase in memberships since this occurred. I think there are several reasons for this, but I believe that fatigue is likely one of the primary factors. I am asking all members to reach out to former colleagues to remind them of the benefits of a strong and viable Public Lands Foundation. The organization can only remain relevant if we can continue to populate it with individuals who are passionate about the public lands and BLM who is tasked with the challenging and rewarding job of managing them.

As an organization, the PLF will do its best to bring critical issues affecting Federal employees to your attention in a timely manner. The PLF weighs in on these issues if they are specific to BLM, but we simply do not have the bandwidth to do so for those that affect all Federal employees. I want to encourage our members to continue to contact their Congressional delegations about these issues and thank those that have done so. It is so important to make your voice heard!

Please be sure to save the dates on your calendar for the 2026 PLF Annual Meeting which will be held in Phoenix, Arizona, on September 15-16. Full details will be provided in the summer edition of *The Monitor*. Please take care of yourselves and I will talk to you again soon.

## 2026 FUND RAISING

### Our 2026 Fund Raising Campaign continues!!

On July 4, 2026, our Nation will commemorate and celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The **America250** celebrations are also an opportunity to reflect on the legacy and value of our Nation's Public Lands to all Americans. The PLF is conducting a fund raising campaign of *Keep Public Lands in Public Hands* to run concurrently with **America250** celebrations during 2026. This effort includes the sale of PLF merchandise that can be ordered through a third party vendor at [bonfire.com/store/public-lands-foundation](https://bonfire.com/store/public-lands-foundation).

It is hoped that you can support our Fund Raising Campaign during 2026.



## GEORGE LEA FOUNDER'S SCHOLARSHIP



One of the most important advocacy programs the PLF engages in each year is the awarding of two \$5,000 scholarships to students who are pursuing a course of study in the natural resources field. The PLF continues to request donations to support the George Lea Founder's Scholarship Fund.

We hope our members and other supporters of the PLF will respond to the call for donations to help the PLF continue this important program. Donations in any amount would be greatly appreciated and can be made either online or by check. Please ensure that you earmark your donation for the Scholarship Fund and thank you in advance for your consideration!

## DO WE HAVE YOUR CURRENT CONTACT INFORMATION?

Please help us keep our records current and ensure we have your current e-mail address on file.

Message us at [info@publicland.org](mailto:info@publicland.org)

## CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW OF RMPs

The General Accountability Office has issued Decisions on several BLM land use plans that the requirements of the Congressional Review Act of 1996 (CRA) apply to BLM decisions and approvals of Resource Management Plans (RMPs). The GAO concluded that a BLM RMP meets the definition of a “rule” and is therefore subject to the submission and review requirements of the CRA. The CRA requires that before a “rule” can take effect, an agency must submit the “rule” to both the House of Representatives and Senate, as well as the Comptroller General for review. The CRA allows Congress to review and disapprove “rules” issued by Federal agencies for a period of 60 days using special procedures. If a Resolution of disapproval is enacted by Congress, then the new “rule” (in this case the approval of an RMP) has no force or effect. These GAO Decisions have broad implications for all BLM land use management plans, since BLM has not provided decisions and approvals of RMPs to Congress for review since passage of the CRA in 1996.

The PLF submitted a letter on September 8, 2025 to the Senate Majority Leader and the Senate Democratic Leader requesting that the Senate avoid such Resolutions, as the unintended consequences of invalidating BLM RMPs for millions of acres of public land would be significant. The PLF also requested that Congress amend the CRA to clarify that BLM RMPs prepared under the statutory authority of Section 202 of FLPMA are not “rules or regulations” subject to CRA review. The PLF letter to the Senate has been posted to the PLF website.

The House of Representatives and Senate have to date approved Resolutions to disapprove the Miles City RMP, North Dakota RMP, Alaska Central Yukon RMP, National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPRA) Integrated Activity Plan, and

Buffalo, Wyoming RMP. *The GAO on January 15, 2026 also subsequently issued a Decision that the BLM decision and approval of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument RMP in Utah meets the definition of a “rule” and is subject to the CRA. This Decision by the GAO will now potentially impact the management plans for BLM National Monuments and National Conservation Areas*



Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, UT  
(BLM photo)

## ELECTRONIC MAILING ONLY

The PLF has gone to an all digital distribution of the quarterly *Monitor* newsletter to save on printing and mailing costs of our newsletter. All editions of the *Monitor* are distributed electronically through e-mail to PLF members and are available on the PLF website.

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## REQUEST FOR AWARD NOMINATIONS LANDSCAPE STEWARDSHIP AWARD LIFETIME SERVICE AWARD OUTSTANDING PUBLIC LAND PROFESSIONAL AWARDS

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The Public Lands Foundation is accepting nominations of a private citizen(s) or group(s) who deserve to be recognized for their sustained contributions to the conservation and management of public lands administered by BLM. The **PLF Landscape Stewardship Award** honors the work done by private citizens/groups who work to advance and sustain community-based stewardship on a landscape scale that includes, in whole or in part, lands administered by BLM. The focus on landscapes is intended to be broad in nature versus small-scale, local, project-oriented efforts. PLF members, partner organizations, and BLM employees are encouraged to submit nominations for the PLF Landscape Stewardship Award by July 15, 2026. The nomination form and guidelines for the Landscape Stewardship Award can be found on the PLF website under the “Programs” and “Awards” links. Please send nominations by July 15, 2026, to Dave Mari at [dmari@publicland.org](mailto:dmari@publicland.org).

The Public Lands Foundation is also seeking nominations for its 2026 **Lifetime Service Award**. Every year the PLF honors one or two individuals for their lifetime career achievements. Any career BLM employee is eligible, regardless of job, grade, profession, etc. Nominees should be retirees who had a career that lasted at least 30 years with at least

20 years having been with BLM. The award can be granted posthumously. Recipients of this prestigious award are those who have demonstrated exceptional performance in furthering the management of public lands, inspiring public and employee participation, and providing leadership that “made a difference”. Full criteria for nomination can be found on the PLF website under the “Programs” and “Awards” links. Lifetime Service Award nominations are due by July 15, 2026, and should be submitted to Maggie Wyatt at [51booklover@gmail.com](mailto:51booklover@gmail.com).

The PLF is also seeking nominations for two **Public Land Professional Awards**, one for Managerial/Administrative employees and one for Technical (Resources)/Operational disciplines. This will be the 36<sup>th</sup> year the PLF has given these national awards to active or recently active BLM employees who have demonstrated outstanding professional performance during the past three years. These awards are focused on recent accomplishments, rather than a career of service with BLM. We invite you to identify, no later than July 15, 2026, those individual(s) that, in your opinion, are deserving of these prestigious awards. Outstanding employees deserve recognition. Full criteria for nomination for the awards can be found on the PLF website.

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## PUBLIC LANDS FOUNDATION GOALS

- Keep lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in public ownership and open to use by the public.
- Support the long-term protection, conservation, and restoration of units of the National Landscape Conservation System, as distinctly unique among the public lands managed by BLM.
- Support multiple use management under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.
- Encourage professionalism by BLM employees.
- Increase the public’s understanding of and support for the proper management of the public lands.

## FRIENDS ORGANIZATIONS

**Editor:** Local “Friends” organizations support the work of the BLM on the public lands. This concept, like the National Landscape Conservation System, was part of then Secretary Bruce Babbitt’s vision in 1996 for a successful system of protected BLM lands for the next century. In this edition of the Monitor we are highlighting the Empire Ranch Foundation which supports BLM in the management of the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area located in southern Arizona. The 45,000 acre Las Cienegas National Conservation Area was established by Congress in December 2000 by P.L. 106-538. More than 160,000 people visit the NCA each year and BLM administers some 30 Special Recreation Permits authorizing recreational and other activities on the public lands. The Friends organizations, like the Empire Ranch Foundation, make these visitor experiences better

### EMPIRE RANCH FOUNDATION by Rick Collins, Foundation Vice President

Gold as far as you can see. The Empire Ranch and Las Cienegas National Conservation Area are carpeted with golden grasses, reflecting the sun and overwhelming the visitor with its beauty. The region saw a sweeping arc of conflict and progress unfold across its rolling hills, green valleys, and towering mountains. The landscape still embraces the mythical old west in its soil. Over 52 movies and TV shows have been filmed here. The landscape is as attractive as any in Arizona, and has been a desired backdrop for both on-screen passionate kisses and lethal gunplay. Thanks to forward thinking visionaries it remains today protected under BLM stewardship, aided by the Empire Ranch Foundation.

In southeastern Arizona, less than an hour from the city of Tucson, lies the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (NCA) with some 45,000 acres of rolling grasslands and woodlands. Mountain ranges, part of the sky islands of southern Arizona, surround the grasslands, and ribbons of green riparian waterways cut through them. Cienega Creek



Las Cienegas NCA, AZ (BLM photo)

supports the NCA and allows a dynamic plant and animal community to thrive. The landscape is also rich in cultural resources and historic structures.

Prehistoric peoples lived on this land before shifting climates transformed it. In later centuries, the O’odham farmed the nearby waterways, and a Spanish mission took hold along the creek to the west. During the historic period, the broad plain functioned largely as a travel corridor. After the American Civil War, western expansion brought new settlers. Cattle ranching soon emerged as a defining force in the region’s growth.

In the late 1860s, a ranch was established at the top of the grass plains, supported by perennial flow in the nearby Empire Gulch. In 1876, one hundred and fifty years ago, the Empire Ranch was established by three Englishmen. Walter L. Vail, a native of Liverpool, Nova Scotia, joined Englishman Herbert Hislop in founding the ranch. John Harvey, an Englishman from Bermuda, joined the partnership a few months later. The ranch began in a sparse four-room adobe structure, complete with sod roof and dirt floors.



Las Cienegas NCA–Ranch Operations, AZ (BLM photo)

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**EMPIRE RANCH FOUNDATION** *(continued)*

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The ranch truly became an empire, touching the mountains to the north and the Mexican border to the south. In 1879, the Total Wreck mine was opened on the property and added much needed capital into the ranch. The success of the ranch was further guaranteed by the building of the railroad in 1881, not far to the north, and shortly afterwards with the extension of rails through the valley south of the ranch. Empire Ranch cattle were entrained to feed a growing California market. At the same time, grass harvesting for hay, a job conducted mostly by members of the O'odham Tribe, became a large local industry. In 1890 the Southern Pacific Railroad began charging Arizona cattlemen exorbitant rates to ship their cattle to market. Edward Vail, six vaqueros, a Chinese cook, and the foreman, organized what became the last great cattle drive in Arizona. On January 29, 1890, the Empire Ranch became the launch pad, driving over 900 cattle through Arizona, crossing the Colorado River at Yuma, and moving over the harsh desert to markets in southern California. The drive was a success and the railroad subsequently reduced its rates to the original cost.

A severe drought began in 1891, ranches in southern Arizona suffered economic losses, and many cattle perished. The drought, combined with grazing well beyond the land's carrying capacity, caused an impact unequalled in Arizona history. The landscape of southern Arizona was changed forever. The Empire Ranch entered modern times when purchased by the Boice family, incorporated under the name the Chiricahua Ranches Company. The ranch buildings, expanded during the 1880s received modern conveniences. Propane and natural gas were piped in and a swimming pool was added to ease suffering through the Arizona summers. In the 1940s and 1950s, during the peak of the Western movie making period, numerous film stars visited the ranch as they filmed movies on the grasslands. The landscape would become iconic, "starring" in the movies. The ranch and surrounding land narrowly escaped becoming a massive housing development when they were transferred to public ownership in

1988, placing them under the care of BLM, and in 2000 the public lands were designated by Congress as the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area.



**Empire Ranch, Las Cienegas NCA, AZ**

The BLM was tasked with preserving the historic Empire Ranch headquarters buildings within the NCA. Studies were conducted to support and specify appropriate historic preservation. To assist in this work, the Empire Ranch Foundation (ERF) was established as a private non-profit organization. The goal of the ERF is to work

with BLM to develop private support to preserve the ranch buildings and enhance the educational and recreational opportunities it offers to the general public.

The Foundation has hosted various activities to raise funds and draw awareness to the ranch and the importance of its preservation. Under the leadership of a Boice family member, Faith Boice, the organization has hosted the Cowboy Festival, National Day of the Cowboy, the popular Christmas at the Ranch, and trail rides.



**Empire Ranch—Educational Outreach** (BLM photo)

The Foundation is broadening its interpretation of the ranch to tell a more complete story. Native peoples, Mexican vaqueros, and other cultural groups each bring rich perspectives on ranch life and the Cienegas. The interpretive program now also includes hands on demonstrations of traditional

ranching skills—practices that have largely faded in today’s digital world.

As the ERF continues to mature, the focus is aiding BLM through financial support. The goal is to allow

the agency to invest in the property’s future. The aging buildings are a problem for BLM, whose funding is aimed toward the landscape and not historic structures. The Foundation will continue to support BLM and the historic ranch for future generations.

## BLM EXPERIENCED SERVICES PROGRAM Bruce Delgado, Natural Resources Specialist – BLM California Central Coast Field Office, Fort Ord

Since its launch in 2019, the Bureau of Land Management’s Experienced Services Program (BLMESP) has provided a pathway for professionals ages 55 and over to continue contributing their knowledge, skills, and passion to public land stewardship. Through the program, administered via NEW Solutions, ESP enrollees bring invaluable continuity and expertise to mission critical work across the agency.

One of the program’s standout enrollees is Bruce Delgado, a Natural Resources Specialist serving at the Fort Ord National Monument in California. Bruce’s work demonstrates how experienced professionals elevate conservation outcomes in ways that create lasting impact. Bruce joined the Fort Ord team as an ESP enrollee following a distinguished BLM career that included roles with Fort Ord and the Clear Creek Management Area where he gained decades of ecological knowledge and field experience. Through the BLM ESP, he continues to advance public land conservation while mentoring the next generation of environmental professionals.

At Fort Ord, Bruce has an essential role in a multiyear effort to remove invasive and predatory bullfrogs, one of the biggest threats to the California tiger salamander and California red legged frog, both protected species. By coordinating and actively participating

in bullfrog removal sessions, he has helped reduce bullfrog numbers to levels low enough to disrupt their reproductive cycle. Serving as both a mentor and a consistent contributor, Bruce has enabled BLM to expand the number of removal sessions conducted each season.

Aubrie Benerou, BLM Botanist and Bruce’s Technical Advisor, reflects on the season’s success:

*We had a wonderful and productive field season working with Bruce on our invasive bullfrog removal project. He removed over 500 bullfrogs and helped the California red legged frog population persist.*



Bruce Delgado inventorying bullfrogs collected during the Spring 2025 session.

Bruce’s own sense of accomplishment is equally clear:

*We are extremely pleased with both years’ results and wait with anticipation to find out how many bullfrogs turn up in 2026 —and how many in each life stage and at which ponds. Hopefully, there will be fewer to catch each year, and we are headed toward zero bullfrogs for the benefit of rare species such as the California red legged*

*frog, California tiger salamander, and western pond turtle.*

For more information about the BLM Experienced Services Program and NEW Solutions, visit [www.NEWSolutions.org](http://www.NEWSolutions.org).

## LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY UPDATE



Photo by Ray Brady

The PLF continues to monitor Congressional legislation, rulemaking activities, and Executive Orders pertaining to the Department of the Interior, BLM, and public lands management. The PLF, as an advocacy organization for the public lands, is actively engaged in providing our perspectives on a wide range of issues including the annual BLM appropriations, any program oversight hearings, proposed amendments to FLPMA and other major statutes affecting public lands management, and proposed regulations regarding BLM resource programs. Reviewing legislation and proposed rules and preparing comments and testimony, when appropriate, is an important part of our advocacy work. We update our Position Statements and Letters and Testimony web pages on our website under the “Advocacy” link and provide legislative and regulatory updates in the *Monitor* on significant actions.

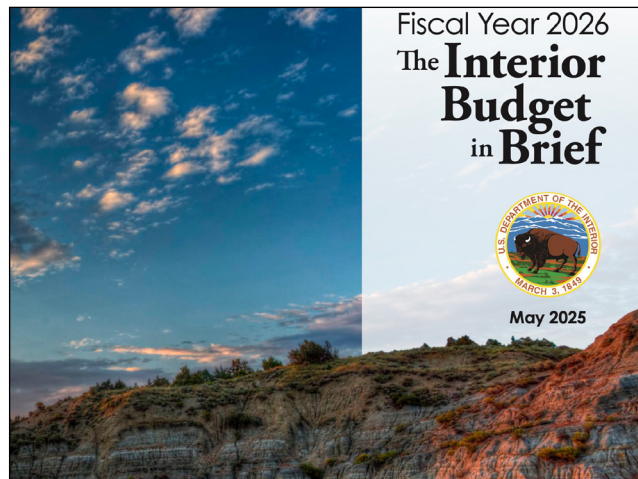
### APPROPRIATIONS

**STATUS:** The House on January 8 and the Senate on January 15, 2026 approved a Fiscal Year 2026 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill that would provide \$1.26 billion in funding for the BLM Lands and Resources appropriation. The President signed this Appropriations bill on January 23, 2026. This level of funding is substantially above the President’s BLM proposed 2026 Budget and represents only a 2.7 percent reduction in funding from 2025. The approved 2026 Appropriations bill also restores funding for the National Conservation Lands program and funding for the BLM Renewable Energy program.

**SUMMARY:** Congress in January 2026 approved a FY 2026 Appropriations bill for BLM which was substantially above the President’s 2026 proposed Budget. The approved Appropriations bill represents only a 2.7 percent reduction from 2025 funding levels. However, budget proposals for future fiscal years include several proposals that could potentially impact the Department of the Interior

and BLM. Some of these potential budget proposals could include the sale of public lands to generate additional Federal revenues, proposals to increase Federal mineral leasing to increase revenues, and further reductions in staffing and resource programs to reduce Federal expenditures.

**PLF POSITION:** The PLF submitted written testimony on March 10, 2025 to the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies on the BLM 2026 Budget to assist in the discussion of funding needs for the public lands. The PLF highlighted the importance of funding in the energy and minerals program areas, continued funding for the greater sage-grouse initiative, concerns over the ever increasing costs in the wild horse and burro program, need to address wildland fire



and rangeland and forest health issues, backlog of grazing lease and permit renewals, and the dramatic increase in recreation use of the public lands. The PLF will closely monitor future budget proposals and identify those areas that would significantly impact BLM staffing and resource management programs.

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CONSERVATION REGULATIONS –  
43 CFR 1600 (PLANNING)  
AND 6100 (ECOSYSTEM RESILIENCE)

**STATUS:** The BLM on September 11, 2025 published in the Federal Register a Proposed Rule to formally rescind the May 2024 Conservation and Landscape Health Rule (Public Lands Rule). The public comment period on the Proposed Rule ended on November 10, 2025 and 147,649 public comments were received. **The BLM on February 27, 2026 submitted the Final Rule to rescind these regulations to the Office of Regulatory Affairs at OMB for review before publication in the Federal Register.**

**SUMMARY:** The BLM in February 2025 rescinded an internal policy memorandum (IM2024-038) that had previously been issued to implement the “restoration and mitigation” leasing system provided for in the May 2024 Public Lands Rule and also rescinded policy memorandum IM 2024-035 that required the identification of priority restoration landscapes. The BLM on September 11, 2025 published a Proposed Rule to rescind the Conservation and Landscape Health Rule. House and Senate Democrat members of Congress on November 10, 2025 signed a joint letter to Secretary Burgum and Acting BLM Director Groffy requesting that the proposed rescission of the Public Lands Rule be withdrawn. A coalition of 180 western elected local officials on November 6, 2025 also signed a joint letter to the Acting BLM Director requesting that the proposed rescission of the Public Lands Rule be withdrawn. In addition, a group of former BLM managers provided comments to the BLM that “the *Public Lands Rule* supports the BLM’s multiple use and sustained yield mission and thus should be retained and fully implemented”. The Center for Western Priorities has also reported that some 98 percent of the public comments provided to BLM oppose rescission of the Rule. Several Republican Senators on November 10, 2025 signed a joint letter to Secretary Burgum supporting the rescission of the Public Lands Rule.

**PLF POSITION:** The PLF submitted comments on the original Conservation and Landscape Health Rule and those comments are posted on the PLF website. There are many other authorities that provide BLM the ability for mitigation and restoration of the public lands and BLM will probably continue to use these tools to participate in conservation efforts. Federal, State, and local government collaboration in conservation efforts are also expected to continue throughout the West at different scales and under various other existing authorities. The PLF therefore

decided not to provide comments on the proposed rescission of the Public Lands Rule.

### FIRE AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

**STATUS:** The *Fix Our Forests Act* (H.R.471) passed the House on January 23, 2025. This bill would establish requirements for managing forests on Federal lands, including requirements to reduce wildfire threats, expediting NEPA review of forest management and thinning projects, and implementing those projects. The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee on October 21, 2025 passed the *Fix Our Forests Act* (S.1462) out of the Committee and final action is pending in the full Senate. Several other wildland fire related pieces of legislation have been introduced by both the House and Senate to increase Federal agency response to wildfire issues and have been forwarded to various Congressional Committees for review and potential Hearings. The Secretary of the Interior on September 10, 2025 signed Secretarial Order 3443 that formally established a unified U.S. Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) within the Department of the Interior. The Order consolidates wildland fire and aviation programs within Interior and established a USWFS Fire Chief reporting directly to the Secretary of the Interior. Brian Fennessy, Chief of the Orange County Fire Authority in southern California, has been selected to serve as the new USWFS Fire Chief. The Order also provides for improved efficiency and effectiveness of wildland fire management between Interior and the U.S. Forest Service under existing authorities.

**SUMMARY:** The 119th Congress has introduced numerous wildland fire bills, in an attempt to increase the efficiency of Federal agency wildland



**Brian Fennessy**  
USWFS Fire Chief

fire resources. Many of these bills include similar provisions and parts of the bills in both the House and Senate may be combined to seek bipartisan support. These bills include the *National Prescribed Fire Act*, *Emergency Wildfire Technology Act* (H.R.836), *Strengthening Wildfire Resiliency Through Satellites Act* (H.R.527), *Wildfire Prevention Act* (S.140), *Fit for*

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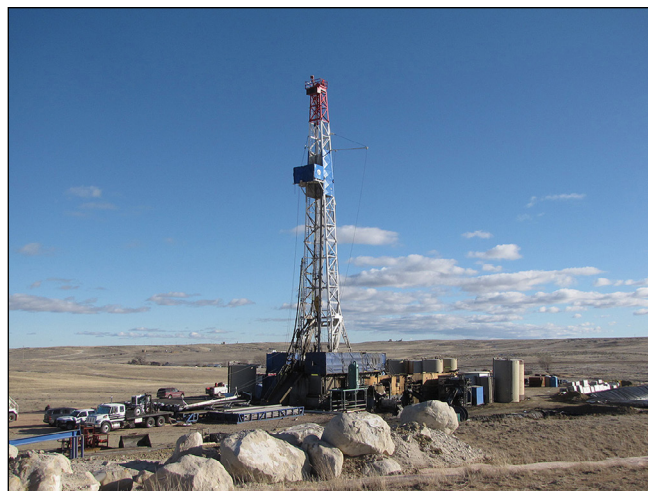
*Purpose Wildfire Readiness Act (S.441), and Wildfire Intelligence and Coordination Act (S.453). Other bills include the Fire Suppression and Response Funding Assurance Act (S.133), Western Wildfire Support Act (S.91), Fire Ready Nations Act (S.306), Emergency Fuel Reduction Act (S.395), Wildfire Response and Preparedness Act (S.902), and the Wildfire Resilient Communities Act.*

**PLF POSITION:** The PLF is a member of the Wildfire Resilience Coalition (WFC) which is comprised of a diverse partnership of over 40 organizations including conservation groups, professional societies, tribal interests, wildfire interests, states, counties, universities, timber associations, and others. The WFC works to support the consensus recommendations of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission, which released a comprehensive report on wildland fire actions in September 2023. As part of WFC, the PLF has signed onto letters favoring the Commission's recommendations, including supporting firefighter pay legislation, improving firefighter working conditions, funding for fuels and forest resiliency projects, and the *Fix Our Forests Act*. The PLF also works closely with the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR), to coordinate our involvement with the WFC. The PLF on March 10, 2025 submitted written testimony on the FY 2026 BLM Budget to the House Committee on Appropriations which included support for the recommendations of the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission and also recommended reauthorization of the Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund. *The PLF also on March 19, 2026 signed onto a joint letter with the NAFSR and other organizations, to the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Agriculture, providing recommendations on an independent study report to be prepared and submitted to Congress on the consolidation of wildland fire management operations.* We will continue to monitor legislative proposals, as Interior moves forward with implementation of Secretarial Order 3443.

## OIL AND GAS REGULATIONS 43 CFR PART 3100

**STATUS:** The U.S. District Court of North Dakota on September 12, 2024 issued a decision to grant an injunction and halt implementation of the BLM Final Methane Rule or Oil and Gas Waste Prevention, Production Subject to Royalties, and Resource Conservation Rule (43 CFR Parts 3160 and 3170). The Court ruled that the regulation represents a significant impingement of States' rights and targets

an area that is already regulated by the Clean Air Act and State laws. **The BLM subsequently announced that the December 10, 2025 enforcement deadlines under the Waste Prevention Rule would be delayed until December 10, 2026 and that the BLM will reassess the Rule.** The Western Energy Alliance and oil and gas industry associations in New Mexico, North Dakota, Wyoming, and Utah on May 15, 2024 filed a petition with the U.S. District Court of Wyoming to invalidate and vacate the BLM Oil and Gas Leasing Rule (43 CFR Part 3100) of April 2024. This rule incorporated provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. **The leasing rule case is still pending. The Department and BLM have also announced the intent to rescind the Oil and Gas Leasing Rule.**



Oil & Gas Drill Rig, Wyoming (BLM photo)

The Secretary of the Interior on February 3, 2025 issued Secretarial Order 3418, in response to the President's Executive Order of January 20, 2025, "Unleashing American Energy", to review the steps that may be appropriate to suspend, revise, or rescind the oil and gas leasing rule and the waste prevention rule and any BLM policy memoranda issued respect to these rules.

**SUMMARY:** The Final Methane or Waste Prevention Rule aims to reduce the waste of natural gas from venting, flaring, and leaks during oil and gas production activities on both Federal and Indian leases. The Final Oil and Gas Leasing Rule updates the BLM onshore oil and gas leasing regulations to codify provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and implement reforms from the Interior Department Report on the Federal Oil and Gas Leasing Program (November 2021). The Final Leasing Rule increases

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royalty rates to 16.67 percent, increases rental rates to \$15 per acre, increases minimum lease bids to \$10 per acre, eliminates non-competitive leasing, reduces the non-operational period for idle wells to four years, increases minimum lease bonds to \$150,000, increases minimum statewide bonds to \$500,000, eliminates nationwide bonds, and includes other provisions to ensure responsible oil and gas leasing and development on the public lands.

**PLF POSITION:** The PLF submitted comments on the Proposed Leasing Rule to BLM on September 8, 2023. Those comments are posted on the PLF website. The PLF also requested in Appropriations written testimony that a 10 percent funding increase be provided to BLM in FY 2026 to handle an expected increase in priority oil and gas leasing workload. **The House and Senate approved a 2026 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill that includes a 4.9 percent increase in the BLM Oil and Gas program from 2025 funding levels.**

#### SOLAR AND WIND ENERGY REGULATIONS 43 CFR 2800

**RULE STATUS:** The Department of the Interior on May 14, 2025 announced it is moving to rescind the solar and wind energy Final Rule published on April 11, 2024, which had aimed to incentivize renewable energy development on the public lands. The President's proposed 2026 Budget would have eliminated funding for renewable energy programs in the Department of the Interior. **However, the House and Senate approved a FY 2026 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill that restored funding for the BLM Renewable Energy program and included language that requires the timely review of all energy projects on the public lands, including renewable energy projects.** The Secretary on July 15, 2025, issued a Department memo that established new Department review procedures for wind and solar energy projects on Federal lands that

will result in slowing down the permitting process. The Secretary also on August 1, 2025, issued Secretarial Order 3438 that requires further reviews of solar and wind energy projects on the public lands and consider the "energy project's capacity density" in the decision-making process for wind and solar projects that are "inefficient uses of Federal lands". **Twenty states, including seven western states, on January 22, 2026, filed a brief in Federal District Court to join a December 23, 2025 legal challenge undertaken by several renewable energy industry organizations that challenges the actions taken by the administration to obstruct the development of wind and solar energy projects in the U.S.**

**RULE SUMMARY:** The Final Rule adjusted and reduced rental fees for solar and wind energy authorizations, provided BLM more flexibility in processing applications for solar and wind energy development in designated leasing areas, and updated criteria on prioritizing solar and wind energy right-of-way applications. The Reconciliation Budget Bill ("One Big Beautiful Bill Act", P.L. 119-21) signed by the President on July 4, 2025, includes an amendment that would establish a royalty rate of 3.9 percent of gross proceeds for solar and wind energy authorizations on the public lands and also provide for a distribution of 25 percent of revenues to the State and 25 percent of revenues to the local County.

**PLF POSITION:** The PLF has supported renewable energy development on the public lands and submitted comments on the Proposed Rule to BLM on August 9, 2023. Those comments are posted on the PLF website. The PLF also on July 31, 2025, sent a letter to the Secretary requesting that the Department memo of July 15, 2025 be rescinded and that the permitting of solar and wind energy projects proceed under normal BLM review and approval procedures. **The House and Senate included language in the 2026 Appropriations act that requires the timely review of renewable energy projects.**

## BLM LEADERSHIP

With the continued changes in the leadership positions of BLM, we would like to provide an update on the current BLM Leadership, including the State Directors that provide the day-to-day on-the-ground management for the public lands. **The Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee on February 25, 2026 held a confirmation hearing for BLM Director nominee Steve Pearce (NM). The Committee on March 4, 2026 voted to advance the nomination to the full Senate for consideration. No vote on the nomination has been held to date by the full Senate.** The following are the current Deputy Directors and the State Directors for each of the BLM State Offices:

Director	Bill Groffy ( <i>Acting</i> )
Principle Deputy Director	Bill Groffy
Deputy Director, Operations	Jeff Krauss ( <i>Acting</i> )
Alaska State Office	Kevin Pendergast
Arizona State Office	Raymond Suazo
California State Office	Joe Stout
Colorado State Office	Tom Workman ( <i>Acting</i> )
Eastern States Office	Leah Baker ( <i>Acting</i> )
Idaho State Office	Meagan Conry ( <i>Acting</i> )
Montana State Office	Sonya Germann
Nevada State Office	Jon Raby
New Mexico State Office	Gera Ashton ( <i>Acting</i> )
OR/WA State Office	Kim Prill ( <i>Acting</i> )
Utah State Office	Tom Heinlein ( <i>Acting</i> )
Wyoming State Office	Tanya Thrift ( <i>Acting</i> )

## INTERIOR FEDERAL

Since 2017, the Interior Federal Credit Union and the PLF have supported one another's missions. The Credit Union currently offers membership to employees and their families, members, and volunteers of the PLF. The Credit Union in 2024 expanded the partnership to support PLF programs, including the George Lea Founder's Scholarship. The Credit Union makes a yearly donation to the PLF Scholarship Fund and allows individuals in search of membership eligibility a way to join both the Credit Union and the PLF. The PLF has added 97 new members to our membership rolls since September 2024 under this partnership effort.

Interior Federal is the official credit union for the Department of the Interior and has also shown support and assistance to those Federal employees that are being financially impacted by the recent layoffs, terminations, unplanned retirements, and early-outs that are taking place across the Federal government. Additional information on Credit Union assistance can be obtained by calling 800-914-8619 or accessing the Credit Union website at [interiorfederal.org](https://interiorfederal.org).



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## IN MEMORIAM

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The PLF is committed to never forgetting the dedicated employees of BLM who have left us. We do so on our website's Memorial Wall and by publishing names of those who passed away in the *Monitor*. If you have a death to report, please e-mail us at [obits@publicland.org](mailto:obits@publicland.org), preferably with a link to or copy of an obituary. You can rely on the PLF to keep you informed of topical news on the public PLF Facebook page, our website, other social media sites and the *Monitor* newsletter.



Emigrant National Historic Trail – WY (BLM photo)

**Carl Eugene Bezanson** on April 28, 2025, in Evanston, WY. Carl graduated from Southern Utah State University with a double major in Botany and Zoology and continued his education in Range Management at Utah State University. His career as a BLM Range Conservationist covered over 40 years and he was also involved in the wildland firefighting program.

**James “Jim” Binando** on January 12, 2026, in Billings, MT. Jim was presented the PLF Outstanding Public Land Professional Award in 1997 while he was the Chief of Land Resources in the BLM Montana State Office. Jim provided leadership with several land exchanges over the years to improve public land management and was also instrumental in the BLM acquisition of the Pompeys Pillar property in 1991, which was designated as the Pompeys Pillar National Monument in 2001. He directed the land withdrawal of over 20,000 acres of public land adjacent to Yellowstone National Park to prevent mining in the area. He also provided leadership to BLM's involvement in the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial (2003-2006).

**Craig Bruce Harmon** on February 2, 2026, in Richfield, UT. Craig attended Brigham Young University and earned a Bachelor's degree and Master's degree in Archaeology. He worked as an Archaeologist in the BLM Richfield District and also served as the

Federal government liaison with 22 southwestern native Tribes. He retired in 2012 after 35 years of public service.

**Marlowe Eugene “Gene” Kinch** on March 19, 2026, in Rock Springs, WY. Gene was a graduate of Colorado State University with a degree in Range Management. He had a long career with BLM and retired in Wyoming.

**Rodney Paul Lee** on February 28, 2026, in Fillmore, UT. He graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno with a degree in Business Management. Rod spent his career with BLM as a Realty Specialist in Richfield, UT.

**Paul Liston Reeves** on January 19, 2026, in Joplin, MO. Paul was a veteran of the U.S. Army. He was a BLM Cadastral Surveyor and retired from the BLM in 1995.

**Troy Lee Salyers** on November 27, 2025, in Farmington, NM. Troy attended Northern Arizona University where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering. He worked for BLM in Farmington, NM as a Petroleum Engineer and Civil Engineer for 22 years. He had a love for math and physics and tutored children for many years at the Boys and Girls Club in Farmington.

*Note: Putting together the Memoriam list in the **Monitor** and maintaining the **Memorial Wall** on the PLF website takes a lot of work by PLF volunteers. If you find errors, or if you know of something we may have missed, we apologize, and will correct the record. If you have concerns, please let Ray Brady know at [rbrady@publicland.org](mailto:rbrady@publicland.org).*

## DONATIONS\*

MEMORIAL DONATIONS		GENERAL/ADVOCACY FUND	
<b>RECEIVED FROM</b> Kathy Eaton Maggie Wyatt	<b>IN MEMORY OF</b> Sandy Dunn Wally Meyer	Kathy Eaton    Ted Hudson    Maggie Wyatt  Elaine Zielinski  Robin and Ryszard Chetkowski  Mardy and Carolyn Droscher  Gregg and Mary Simmons	
<b>SCHOLARSHIP FUND</b> Mardy and Carolyn Droscher			

\* This list reflects donations received during the period of January 1 through March 31, 2026. Donations received after this period will be reported in the next edition of the **Monitor**.

You can make a designated donation by credit card on our website at [www.publicland.org](http://www.publicland.org), or by check sent to the Public Lands Foundation, P.O. Box 7226, Arlington, VA 22207. You can also make a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) directly to the PLF from an eligible individual retirement account (IRA). In your transmittal, please make sure to mention if your donation is for the **PLF General Fund**, the **George Lea Founder’s Scholarship**, or the **Student Congress Fund**. Remember, if you are making a donation in memory of someone who has passed away, you can designate your donation to go to one of these funds. The PLF has also established a **PLF Endowment Fund** for larger donations to support the long-term purposes and mission of the organization. The PLF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization. Your donations are tax-deductible to the maximum extent permitted under the law.

In addition, the PLF has a fund raising campaign that is running concurrently with the **America250** celebrations during 2026. This effort includes the sale of PLF merchandise that can be ordered through a third party vendor at [bonfire.com/store/public-lands-foundation](http://bonfire.com/store/public-lands-foundation). This fund raising campaign supports the advocacy efforts of the Public Lands Foundation.

## FOUNDATION FOR AMERICA’S PUBLIC LANDS

The Foundation for America’s Public Lands was established by Congress in 2017 and formally launched by the Department of the Interior and BLM in January 2022. The Foundation’s mission includes raising private funding that can be matched by Federal appropriations to help BLM address public land management issues across the 245 million acres of BLM-managed public land. Information on partnership opportunities with the Foundation can be found on their website at [americaslands.org](http://americaslands.org). The PLF will collaborate with the Foundation for America’s Public Lands where we have mutual interests and continue our advocacy efforts for BLM and the sustainable management of the public lands. The PLF on March 19, 2026 submitted a letter to Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittees that supported a funding increase in the future Fiscal Year 2027 Interior appropriations bill for the Foundation for America’s Public Lands.



THE PUBLIC LANDS FOUNDATION IS A TAX EXEMPT 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The *Monitor* is what we make it and we encourage you to provide Letters to the Editor or provide other reviews and comments on articles included in your newsletter. It is important to hear from our membership, and if you like something or don't like something, let us know. If you do send an e-mail to the Editor, don't be surprised if it winds up as a Letter to the Editor in the next edition of the *Monitor*. Please provide your comments to [rbrady@publicland.org](mailto:rbrady@publicland.org). Comments should be limited to no more than 500 words in length. In addition, members are encouraged to use the [bod@publicland.org](mailto:bod@publicland.org) e-mail address to communicate with the PLF Board.

### BLM LAND USE PLANNING

I recently provided written testimony to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on the BLM land use planning process under FLPMA and wanted to share some of those thoughts with other members of the Public Lands Foundation. The following are excerpts from my testimony, with minor edits for brevity and clarity in this shortened version.

The land use planning function has been applied, over and over again, for decades, across the 245 million acres of public lands the Bureau of Land Management manages. Those local in-state processes have produced results for the American people. Most important, each land use plan has arrived at a locally and specifically defined balance that integrates outputs related to all the values included in the congressional definition of "multiple use" in FLPMA, including the conservation values like recreation opportunities, watershed protection, wildlife and fish habitat, and the natural scenic, scientific, and historical values of the planning area.

Land use planning invites robust public participation, creating a multi-year public record around all the issues and land uses in each planning area. When a final planning decision is reached, the public record for the plan underlies and supports all the final planning outcomes and decisions. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that land use planning for public lands is a public deliberation exercise, at the local community level, about lands local citizens know well.

The Federal land use planning process under FLPMA does far more than just influence permitting and project development on public lands. It is central to public land management overall, and for some land uses a Resource Management Plan (RMP) decision is required as foundation. By law, RMPs determine a balance among resource values,

under principles of multiple use and sustained yield, through a local participative process. Some land uses, such as development under the Mineral Leasing Act, identification of utility and transportation corridors, making lands available for sale, and the area's framework for livestock grazing, are directly dependent on land use plan outcomes. In summary, RMPs shape access to, and balance among, multiple uses. By law, each area's planning balance must address conservation obligations required in FLPMA and under a range of related conservation laws. For this reason, state, local and interest group/project sponsor perspectives are inherently very specific to each planning area and effort, and not similar across all public land states.

There is much to celebrate, both nationally and locally, regarding land use planning. There have been great leaps of progress since the early Management Framework Plans (MFPs) in the 1970s and early 1980s. The quality of the public information around issues the public has identified has risen to high levels. Public participation has grown, both in volume and in quality. One key to producing a high-quality land use plan today is to promote public and Tribal participation early, and then to maintain regular contact. Land use planning has served as a mechanism for working toward consensus on very difficult and complex public land management issues.

Land use planning is the basis for all of BLM's work and it impacts all multiple uses, including energy development, grazing, hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation, and more. The clearest step forward to improve the Federal land use planning process under FLPMA and to make permitting and project development on public lands more efficient, is to support improved capacity, both in BLM staffing and funding. There is no substitute for doing the on-the-ground, local-community-level work. Every planning area and planning process is different with different issues and alternatives. A solid RMP incorporates and addresses those differences.

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** (continued)

There is also no substitute for local in-state participation, with the public, with local and state officials, and with Tribes. The public has become sophisticated and informed to a degree that they will be suspicious of any process that does not respect the issues they raise, or one that appears to circumvent the FLPMA "balancing" discussion with local planning information as its foundation. The best approach is, by far, to invest in public participation as an integral part of the land use planning process.

The use of the Congressional Review Act (CRA) to nullify land use management plans has introduced new questions surrounding the reliability of land use planning processes and authorizations based on these plans. I believe that CRA resolutions to disapprove BLM land use management plans will have profound impacts on the overall land use planning function, create substantial uncertainty and conflict around authorized land uses that rely on land use plan decisions, and create specific problems in the planning areas directly affected. While I am unsure of the extent, using a political process to vacate plans with years of public input will undermine public confidence in the planning process. And, given language in the CRA statute that requires rules to be submitted to Congress and the Comptroller General in order to take effect, it is unclear which, or whether all, RMPs finalized after the CRA became law could be considered invalid.

The range of land uses and management functions potentially affected is broad including energy development, transmission rights of way, recreation, grazing permits and leases, wildlife conservation projects, or logging. Three impacts are predictable:

- Increased litigation risk for authorizations that are controversial, that now have questionable planning foundations, and that would not have been allowed under the vacated plan(s).
- A cautious, risk-averse approach to land use authorization processes, particularly increased levels of analysis, where the underlying land use plan is no longer reliable or is inconsistent with the factual record created for the plan that was vacated.
- The CRA's prohibition of a rule that is "substantially the same" appears to be inconsistent with FLPMA and NEPA requirements for land use plans. It is unclear how those conflicts will be resolved.

Until adaptations addressing these impacts are designed, a cautious approach to reforms will avoid further harm to the land use planning process and its role supporting multiple use and sustained yield management of the public lands.

**James Kenna**  
Retired BLM State Director, PLF Oregon

The *Monitor* generally reflects ongoing PLF activities, events, updates, awards, and information on former BLM employees. We encourage articles and discussions of issues by posting quality content that also provides a positive exposure of the goals, objectives, and mission of the PLF. However, we need to take some precautions when posting information to the newsletter and other forms of social media to ensure appropriate rules of behavior. In keeping a positive experience for our members, we reserve the right to publish only comments, photos, and other material deemed appropriate by the PLF. We intend on maintaining a friendly and professional tone in the articles in the *Monitor* and any Letters to the Editor.

**PLF MEMBERSHIP**

**PLF ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES**

Regular .....	\$50
Contributing .....	\$100
Sponsoring .....	\$200
Patron.....	\$500

**PLF MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

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