



For America's Heritage

THE PUBLIC LANDS Monitor

P.O. Box 7226, Arlington, VA 22207
301-327-0535 NEW!

www.publicland.org
info@publicland.org

VOLUME XXXIX No. 2

SUMMER QUARTER 2026

REFLECTIONS ON THE PUBLIC LANDS FOUNDATION BY GEORGE LEA, FOUNDER AND PAST PRESIDENT, PLF

Editors

Ray Brady
Margaret Lliteras

Board of Directors

President Mary Jo Rugwell
Vice Pres. Don Simpson
VP-DC Affairs
VP-Ops Ray Brady
VP-Ops Beau McClure
Secretary Ray Brady
Treasurer Mark Davis
Student Congress
Marwa Mahmoud
EX Officio NAFSR
Debbie Hollen
Past Pres. George Lea
Henri Bisson
Ed Shepard
Jesse Juen

Directors-at-Large

Tom Allen
Dean Bibbes
Bud Cribley
Jim Currihan
Kim Harb
Chuck Hunt
Eric Janes
John Kwiatkowski
Scott MacPherson
Mat Millenbach
Tim O'Brien
Ed Roberson
John Ruhs
Paul Summers
Maggie Wyatt

State Representatives

AK Meg Jensen
AZ Beau McClure
CA Thomas Zale
CO Jack Placchi
ID Nancy Haug
MT Peter Bierbach
NV Brian Amme
NM Vacant
OR/WA Mike Haske
UT Bill Lamb
WY Bill LeBarron
Midwest &
Eastern States
Jeff Holdren

If I am ever going to comment on the Public Lands Foundation, I had better start soon. My 99th birthday was in June this year, so I better get started.

When I was working for BLM, it always bothered me that once you retired, the Bureau of Land Management could care less and would forget you completely. It also bothered me that someone could work for an agency for 20 or 30 years and walk away with all the knowledge they had gained, close the door, and lose the friendships they had developed along the way. So, by starting the Public Lands Foundation I provided the opportunity for people to stay in touch with friends and to put into practice some of the expertise and knowledge they had gained.

I have had a lot of help along the way, particularly from the PLF Board of Directors who stayed with me for the first 21 years when I was the Founder and President. We were incorporated in the State of Virginia on November 30, 1987. A special thank you must go to Beau McClure and Glenn Collins and Carl Enix for their special help.



George Lea, PLF Founder

Today I am pleased to see that the PLF is doing well with most of our original Position Statements on public land issues updated and current. I am disappointed, however, by the fact that retirees from BLM are not joining the PLF as had been planned. At one point we had more than 700 retirees as PLF members and those numbers have declined over the years. There are a couple of other areas I am concerned about as well.

I just clicked the PLF website and on the membership area there is no discussion of the fact that our membership is primarily retired former BLM employees, which provides the strength of the organization. We are the only national membership organization dedicated solely to the protection and professional management of BLM-managed public lands. As retirees we believe we can offer an objective and non-bureaucratic view of what is happening to the public lands. Our website contains the statement "PLF membership is open to anyone who supports our mission and pays annual dues". Sure, but no mention is made of the point that

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 that you and yours are well and enjoying the summer weather. Here in Wyoming, we've had a warmer spring and a cooler summer thus far, but fortunately no severe weather yet.



Mary Jo Rugwell

I want to start by expressing my appreciation to the LGL membership database team led by Rene Berkhoudt. The team has completed most of the goals they set after last year's Annual Meeting. They are now engaged in monitoring the functioning of the membership database and will make any changes needed if it is not working as intended.

We have been very busy this spring preparing letters of support for a couple of congressional bills. The first is the Public Lands Integrity Act (S. 4455) and the second is the Public Lands Workforce Stability Act (H.R. 8523). I want to express my thanks to Ray Brady for his help with these documents and for his willingness to hand deliver and meet with congressional staffers. I have also asked Bill Disbrow to send out e-blasts to all our members when there are proposed bills which affect Federal employees in general and BLM employees in particular. I appreciate those who have taken the time to contact your congressional members.

We are currently in the process of crafting our annual BLM budget testimony. Thanks to both Don Simpson and Ray Brady for putting together the draft that we will submit to both House and Senate Appropriations Committees once it has been finalized.

The BLM has recently issued proposed revisions to the grazing regulations, the oil and gas leasing regulations, and the methane waste prevention rule.

We have asked a couple of our members to review these regulations and provide consolidated comments that the Public Lands Foundation can submit prior to the end of the 60-day public comment periods. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find subject matter experts to take on these periodic tasks. If you are someone with subject matter expertise or know a recent retiree who would be willing to assist us with this task, please let me know.

A few weeks ago, I was contacted by an employee of the Killian Jornet Foundation. Mr. Jornet is an elite athlete who engages in challenging races and mountain treks all over the world. In the process of these pursuits, he has become fascinated with the topic of public lands in the United States. The Killian Jornet Foundation wanted more information about the PLF and ultimately included this information on their website as they highlighted his next trek on public lands in our country and expressed their support for keeping public lands in public hands. It was a great opportunity to get the word out about our advocacy and cost us only a video call and a couple of e-mail exchanges. If you are interested in seeing the posting, the link is: <https://www.kilianjornetfoundation.org/project/keep-public-lands-in-public-hands/>.

I am pleased to announce that Bud Cribley has joined the PLF Board. Bud's last BLM role was as the State Director in Alaska. After leaving that position, he began a several year stint with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, D.C.

Past PLF President Ed Shepard was recently recognized by the Society of American Foresters with the John A. Beale Memorial Award. More information about this award can be found in this edition of *The Monitor*.

We are only a couple of months away from our Annual Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. It is scheduled for September 15-16, 2026. Registration and hotel information are included in this edition of *The Monitor*. As always, Beau is doing a fantastic job of putting together an interesting and engaging agenda. Please make every effort to join us.

Take care and talk to you again soon.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PUBLIC LANDS FOUNDATION *(continued)*

our membership is primarily made up of retired former BLM employees. Without the notation of the importance of retirees, we are just another organization, amongst many, that have a passing interest in the public lands managed by BLM.

For more than 20 years the PLF has produced a quarterly newsletter called the *Public Lands Monitor*. This is an important tool to keep our members and the general public aware of activities related to BLM public lands. Recently the PLF stopped the printing and mailing of the *Monitor* as it was too expensive to print and mail. The *Monitor* is now only distributed electronically to members and posted on the PLF website. The *Monitor* takes a lot of work to produce on a quarterly basis, so we should consider

the value in the future to continue to print and mail this important information tool on the advocacy work of the PLF for the public lands. We have the money to support such outreach efforts.

It's been a great ride; my career with BLM and the PLF. I have worked and continue to work with a lot of great people. I wake up each morning, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and ready to take on the day.

All our yesterday's have lighted fools, the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. (Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5, by Shakespeare)

2026 SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

The 2026-2027 George Lea Founder's Scholarships have been awarded. The two \$5,000 scholarships are provided annually to junior, senior, or masters-level students studying natural resource management or public land policy. The PLF's Scholarship Committee comprised of Connie Stone, Tim O'Brien, and Dave Stout reviewed and rated 57 applications this year from students at 28 colleges and universities.

The scholarships this year have been awarded to Kyla Baldridge and Kevin McGraw. Kyla is a Masters-level graduate student at the University of Nebraska. Kevin is a Senior at Grays Harbor College near Seattle, Washington.



Kyla Baldridge
University of Nebraska

Kyla Baldridge is a Master's Degree student at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. She is studying Agronomy with a specialization in Range and Forage Sciences. Her research focuses on how fire-driven grazing

management influences cattle movement behavior, land use patterns, forage selection, plant biomass,

and biodiversity. Kyla has experience working as an ecologist for a private company, conducting biological surveys in coordination with the Bureau of Land Management. She also has international experience in ecological and wildlife studies in South Africa and the Canary Islands, Spain.

Kevin DeGraw is a senior at Grays Harbor College, southwest of Seattle, Washington. He is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Forestry, after working in private sector forestry positions, as an intern with the Washington Department of Natural Resources, and as field director for a wilderness therapy program in Utah. Kevin recently was honored as the college's Natural Resources Student of the Year. He has experience in developing forest management plans and integrated pest management strategies. Kevin has hiked over 11,000 miles on public lands, many as a wilderness guide.



Kevin DeGraw
Gray's Harbor College

2026 PLF ANNUAL MEETING SEPTEMBER 15 & 16, 2026

Come join us for this year's Annual Meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, on September 15 and 16, 2026.

HOTEL RESERVATIONS: A block of rooms has been reserved at the **Holiday Inn Express Phoenix Airport, 3401 E. University Drive, Phoenix, Arizona 85034**. 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 hotel reservations by contacting the Holiday Inn Express Phoenix Airport at **602-453-9900** or use the hotel on-online reservation link posted on our PLF website at www.publicland.org. Your reservations must be made by **August 19, 2026**. Be sure to mention the **Public Lands Foundation** to get our group rate.

PLF MEETING REGISTRATION: Please register before the **Early Registration Deadline of August 19, 2026**. The Meeting Registration Form for the PLF meeting can be found on the PLF website at www.publicland.org. The Meeting Registration Form is also included in this edition of the *Public Lands Monitor*.

TUESDAY LUNCH BUILD YOUR OWN DELI SANDWICH BUFFET: Your choice of Mixed Green or Pasta Salads; choice of Roast Beef, Turkey, Ham, or

Hard Salami; choice of Swiss, Cheddar, or Gruyere Cheeses; fresh baked Wheat Sliced Bread; Sesame Buns; assorted bags of chips; Chef's Choice Dessert, Iced Tea, Lemonade, or Water.

TUESDAY EVENING DINNER BUFFET: First Course—Caesar Salad with Herbed Croutons. Second Course—Buttery Mashed Potatoes, Pork Tenderloin or Herb Crusted Chicken. Chef's Choice Seasonal Vegetables, Dinner Rolls with Butter, Iced Tea, Lemonade, or Water. Dessert Station—Cheesecake and Brownies.

WEDNESDAY LUNCH SANDWICH BUFFET: Your choice of Turkey Wrap or Italian Sub. Includes Mixed Green Salad with Ranch Dressing or Balsamic Vinaigrette, bags of assorted Chips, Pickle Spears, Chef's Choice Dessert, Iced Tea, Lemonade, or Water.

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.

The **SILENT AUCTION & RAFFLE** helps support the George Lea Founder's Scholarship Program where we give two awards of \$5,000 every year to deserving students in natural resource fields. Elaine Zielinski is in-charge of this year's silent auction and raffle. We ask that those of you mailing donated items for the silent auction and raffle please send them to Elaine, so that she receives them by September 7, 2026. Her address is: 7314 E. Tailfeather Drive, Scottsdale, AZ 85255-4714. If you are attending the meeting, your donation can be brought to the meeting, but please provide Elaine, in advance, a description of what you are donating, how it will be delivered, and if possible, the item's worth and a suggested minimum bid. Questions regarding the silent auction or raffle can be directed to Elaine at elaine.zielinski@gmail.com.

We look forward to seeing you in September in Phoenix. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact Beau McClure at vpops@publicland.org or by phone at 623-587-7883.

OUTSTANDING PUBLIC LAND PROFESSIONAL AWARD JAMES “TODD” FORBES

The PLF selected James “Todd” Forbes for the 2025 Outstanding Public Lands Professional Employee Award in the Managerial / Administrative Category. His selection was announced in the Fall Quarter 2025 edition of the *Monitor* newsletter. He was presented his award on April 23, 2026 in Klamath Falls, OR by Ed Shepard, representing the PLF, and Kim Prill, Acting BLM Oregon State Director.

Mr. Forbes is the BLM Lakeview District Manager and provides management direction and oversight for approximately 3.5 million acres of public land



Todd Forbes (left) award presentation with Ed Shepard, PLF (right)

in southcentral and southeastern Oregon, varying from mixed conifer forests on the east slope of the Cascade Mountains to the high desert country of Oregon’s outback. Todd has spent his career devoted to serving the American people and being a steward of the public lands. Bringing partners to the table and resources effectively to the ground in a well-informed and reasoned manner are best practices by which Mr. Forbes lives daily. Mr. Forbes’ collaboration with local leaders in prioritizing and planning restoration projects and stewarding restoration activities across the landscape is significant and a model for others to follow.

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS AWARD ED SHEPARD

Ed Shepard, PLF Past President, has been presented the John A. Beale Memorial Award for 2026 by the Society of American Foresters (SAF). This prestigious award will be presented at the 2026 SAF National Convention in Tacoma, Washington on October 8, 2026. The John A. Beale Memorial Award recognizes outstanding efforts over a sustained period of time by an SAF member in the promotion of forestry through voluntary service to the Society. Congratulations to Ed Shepard for this special and well deserved recognition by the Society of American Foresters.



**Ed Shepard
PLF Oregon**

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. 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.

GROUND SHIFT – THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC LANDS

The PLF, represented by Ray Brady on April 29-30, 2026 participated in a Symposium on “Re-Imagining the Future of America’s Public Lands” in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Ground Shift organization. Ground Shift is an independent initiative organized by The Wilderness Society and led by a cross-partisan group of thought-leaders united by a shared goal of advancing bold, structural changes to secure a healthy future for our nation’s public lands. Ground Shift hopes to develop creative, durable, and transformative ideas to shape the future stewardship of the public lands. This involves a vision to update policies, laws, and Federal agency structures that will guide the future management of America’s public lands to meet the challenges of our time.

A Public Land Law Review Commission was established by Congress in 1964 to review existing Federal public land laws and recommend future public land policies. The Commission completed its work and in 1970 published a report *One Third of Our Nation’s Land*. Their recommendations informed, inspired, and shaped the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 that has guided public land policy and management for the past half century. Ground Shift intends to connect people from a wide range of backgrounds and political beliefs to develop an equally ambitious and new strategic playbook to shape a vision for the future of America’s public lands.

The participants in the breakout sessions during the April 2026 Symposium identified some priority

topics for future discussions on developing a future vision for the public lands. These priority topics included the need to develop some broad Public Land Narratives for public outreach messages that would help build political support and a common public mandate for the long-term management of the public lands in the future. Some initial focus areas for these discussions and future public outreach messages should include:

- Federal land management agency organization alignments and budgets
- Landscape and collaborative management
- Co-stewardship and co-management with Tribes
- Recreation uses of the public lands
- Fire management
- Land health and resiliency, including restoration, conservation and mitigation
- Permitting of public land uses
- Alaska-specific issues

The outcomes from the Washington, D.C. Symposium led to further discussions with a different group of participants at a follow-up Symposium in Denver, Colorado on May 27-28, 2026. Ground Shift has stated that this Symposium is the beginning of what may be a several year process of gathering ideas and formulating a vision for the future of the public lands.

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

FUND RAISING

Our 2026 Fund Raising Campaign continues!!

During 2026, our nation is commemorating and celebrating the 250th 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 Fundraising 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. A portion of all sales is returned to the PLF to support our advocacy work for the public lands.

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



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 Interior Federal and the PLF. *The PLF has added 99 new members to our membership rolls since September 2024 under this partnership effort.*



STRENGTH. STEWARDSHIP. COMMUNITY.

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.

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 generous contributions!

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 Congress for review. The CRA allows Congress to review and disapprove “rules” issued by Federal agencies. 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. **These actions will also have serious potential future impacts to Forest management plans, Refuge management plans, and Park management plans.**

The PLF submitted a letter on September 8, 2025 to the Senate Majority and Minority 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. **Congress on April 16, 2026 has now even approved a Resolution to overturn a Forest Plan for the Superior National Forest that had withdrawn lands from mining in the headwaters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota.**

The PLF on September 8, 2025 submitted a letter to Congress requesting that the CRA be amended to clarify that BLM RMPs prepared under the statutory authority of Section 202 of FLPMA are not “rule or regulations” subject to CRA review. Congress should avoid the use of Resolutions under the CRA to disapprove BLM land use plans, as the unintended consequences of invalidating BLM RMPs for millions of acres of public land would be significant. **A law suit filed by Cascadia Wildlands on June 24, 2026 in Federal court in Oregon is now an example of the chaos created by the CRA requirements. This recent lawsuit asserts that a proposed timber sale for the harvest of up to 75.5 million board feet of timber from more than 1,300 acres of public land in western Oregon is legally void since the underlying BLM management plan was never submitted to Congress for review under the CRA. This lawsuit is a direct and foreseeable consequence of the decisions by the GAO to require Congressional reviews of BLM land use plans under the CRA.**

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.

REQUEST FOR AWARD NOMINATIONS

LANDSCAPE STEWARDSHIP AWARD

LIFETIME SERVICE AWARD

OUTSTANDING PUBLIC LAND PROFESSIONAL AWARDS

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 27, 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 27, 2026, to Dave Mari at 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 27, 2026, and should be submitted to Maggie Wyatt at 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 36th 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 27, 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. Nominations should be submitted to Jim Curri van at jimc38@yahoo.com.

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 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 Friends for the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center near Baker City, Oregon and the Friends of the Desert Mountains which supports BLM in the management of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument located in southern California. Congress designated the 2,170 mile Oregon National Historic Trail in November 1978 (P.L. 95-625) under the National Trails System Act. The 280,000 acre Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, jointly managed by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service, was established by Congress in October 2000 by P.L. 106-351. More than 81,000 people visit the Monument Visitor Center each year and thousands more enjoy hiking the 77 designated trails within the Monument. The Friends organizations, like the Friends for the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center and the Friends of the Desert Mountains, make these visitor experiences better.

FRIENDS FOR THE NATIONAL HISTORIC OREGON TRAIL INTERPRETIVE CENTER

BY GINGER L. SAVAGE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

(Thanks to Dave and Joyce Hunsaker for their ongoing support in writing this article. They shared the book **Trail of a Dream** written by the late Dorothy Wooters, who was a key early volunteer at the Interpretive Center. A copy of the book can be read online at www.nhotic.com)

The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, located near Baker City, Oregon, brings to life the historic journey of pioneers who traveled westward on the Oregon Trail in the 19th century. This interactive museum and outdoor site illuminates the challenges, triumphs, and profound impact of this historic migration that shaped the American west. Visitors can explore exhibits that showcase the daily lives of the pioneers and the landscapes they traversed. The exhibits also highlight the cultural connections and collisions of the Native Americans and Euro-American emigrants involved in this monumental movement of people.

Set on a hillside with stunning views, the center features hands-on exhibits, life-size displays, and a replica wagon camp. The 500-acre site includes remnants of the historic Flagstaff Gold Mine and original ruts carved by pioneer wagons. Through engaging presentations and programs, the Center honors the legacy of the Oregon Trail, providing a fascinating look at the hardships and adventures that defined this pivotal chapter in American history.

The effort to establish the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center on Flagstaff Hill near

Baker City, Oregon, began in January 1987. Neil Goldschmidt, newly elected Governor of Oregon, appointed Michael “Mike” Nelson, a Baker City realtor, as Eastern Oregon’s only representative on his 17-member transition council. Mike hoped to bridge the gap between the Governor’s office and the often-overlooked eastern region of Oregon. Baker County, especially hard hit by economic woes, looked to the new Governor’s leadership for help.

Before his inauguration, Governor Goldschmidt unveiled the “Oregon Comeback” initiative, proposing lottery funds for regional recovery programs and inviting each area to submit proposals for State funding. By the mid-1980s, Baker County’s main industries—agriculture, timber, and mining—were in steep decline. Ranching income fell over 75 percent from 1979 to 1984, business closures were widespread, and unemployment reached 19 percent. The outlook was grim.

Local leader Gary Schmidt saw the Oregon Trail as an untapped resource and led the drive to develop an interpretive center. Quickly gaining community and business support, the group presented their plan in Washington, D.C., receiving positive feedback from Oregon’s congressional delegation. Their proposal envisioned a “living museum” with interactive exhibits and historical encampments. Supported by BLM and State officials, the project joined a statewide effort to build four Oregon Trail interpretive centers, with the Baker City center being the first completed.

HISTORIC OREGON TRAIL *(continued)*

The steering committee promoted the idea tirelessly, securing a legislative resolution urging Congress to create a National Monument at Flagstaff Hill. By October 1987, the project had an official name, and Governor Goldschmidt praised Baker County's vision. In April 1988, he announced \$590,000 in State funding, with more for infrastructure. Fundraising was boosted by a \$103,000 donation from Baker City philanthropist Leo Adler, honored with the theater's dedication. By late 1988, BLM took charge of design and construction.

By 1989, the interpretive center was close to reality. A memorandum of understanding clarified that BLM would oversee design and construction, while the Oregon Trail Preservation Trust would handle fundraising and marketing and work to expand trail lands for education. Volunteers secured nonprofit status for supporting organizations. As the May 1992 grand opening neared, construction ramped up. The \$10 million project drew funding from State, Federal, and private sources. Though some amenities were unfinished, the interpretive center opened on Memorial Day weekend 1992, attracting 10,000 visitors. By year's end, over 200,000 people had visited, enjoying living history demonstrations and educational exhibits.

A key to the interpretive center's success was the Trail Tenders, the first volunteer friends group, founded in 1990. This group remained active until late 2022–early 2023. In 2023, Crossroads Carnegie Art Center, a 63 year-old nonprofit organization serving Baker County, began the process to become the Friends organization for the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. After months of research and planning, the Crossroads Board voted to proceed with the agreement.

Unlike most Friends organizations, which exist solely to support their government partners, Crossroads has its own mission to serve the community through the arts. Crossroads and the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center found common ground in arts, culture, heritage, and humanities, ensuring Crossroads could stay true to its mission.

Crossroads brings unique talents and networks to this partnership effort with BLM. Inside the Interpretive Center, our gift shop represents over 100 local and regional artists and connects with hundreds more. The Lone Pine Mercantile was envisioned to showcase local talent and produce gift shop items locally. Guests consistently support local artisans and businesses. Caroline Chalmers was hired to



Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, OR



Oregon Trail Interpretive Center–Wagons, OR

manage the Mercantile, bringing a keen eye for quality and a friendly spirit.

Folklife Programming—A three-year grant from the James & Marion Miller Foundation supports Crossroads’ partnership with the Oregon Folklife Network. Monthly residencies in the Interpretive Center’s Wagon Box Theater bring Oregon Culture

Keepers—basket weavers, poets, leatherworkers, and Indigenous artists—to share their crafts and stories. This program is in a pilot phase with hopes for long-term sustainability.

Market Research—Crossroads secured a grant to hire a firm to analyze the Interpretive Center’s audience and demographics.

Website—Crossroads worked with DDRCM Marketing to build a new website for the Lone Pine Gift Shop at www.nhotic.com, managed in-house for rapid engagement. Support from the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association helps sustain the site.

New Site Map—The Oregon Community Foundation funded a rebranding and new site map, translated into ten languages and provided in large format for the visually impaired. The BLM and Crossroads also support the “Sunflower Lanyard” program for visitors needing extra assistance.

Wagon Assessment—Grants from the Oregon Community Foundation and Oregon Heritage funded an assessment of the center’s ten wagons by Doug Hansen of Hansen Wheel and Wagon. Museum curators and community members observed, and Hansen also gave a wheelwright demonstration. The findings will guide future repairs and maintenance fund raising.

The Friends for the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center faces new opportunities and challenges, including building a sustainable volunteer program to support BLM staff. We bring events management to the Interpretive Center, hosting a Holiday Makers Market each winter and art shows in the Flagstaff Gallery. With funding, this intersection of art and history can expand into more programs.

FRIENDS OF THE DESERT MOUNTAINS

BY KARIN JAFFIE

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

The Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains rise dramatically above Southern California's Coachella Valley, sheltering some 280,000 acres where desert and mountain ecosystems converge. Along the Palms to Pines Scenic Byway, visitors move through five distinct life zones in under an hour—from native California fan palm oases into alpine forest. This biodiversity hotspot is also the ancestral homeland of the Aqua Caliente Band of the Cahuilla Indians, who continue to steward tribal lands within the Monument boundary, a living relationship between people and place that predates the Monument by centuries.



Friends of the Desert Mountains has been part of this landscape since 1987, thirteen years before Congress established the Monument in 2000. The organization was born from a regional awakening when development began pressing against the mountains and a proposed hotel above Rancho Mirage galvanized a coalition of elected officials, developers, and environmentalists who realized the mountains needed protection. From these efforts emerged the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy and the nonprofit that would become the Friends of the Desert Mountains, with many of the same people later driving the Monument's creation.

The Friends of the Desert Mountains is physically located at the Monument Visitor Center, definitely unusual among public land partners and quietly significant. That daily proximity means staff and volunteers are often among the first eyes on the landscape. When smoke began rising during the 2025 Rosa Fire, that presence helped ensure Monument leadership was quickly informed. Today, volunteers with the Friends of the Desert Mountains outnumber agency staff nearly ten to one. They greet visitors, lead interpretive hikes, restore trails, and run youth programs that send children home dust-covered, wide-eyed, and often full of a newfound appreciation for lizards. Since the Friends was founded, volunteers have contributed more than

**Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains
National Monument, CA (BLM photo)**

201,000 hours of service with an estimated \$6.3 million in economic value. One volunteer alone has dedicated more than 12,000 hours: Ada Nuckels was recipient of the BLM's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2022.

The fingerprints of that dedication are visible across the Monument. The Visitor Center continues to upgrade and is now autism-certified and multilingual signage, including Cahuilla where applicable, invites visitors to learn new words along the self-guided Ed Hasty Garden Trail. Junior Rangers earn their badges here. Community scientists survey Windy Point dunes for the imperiled Coachella Valley Milkvetch. In Palm Canyon, a stubborn patch of invasive grasses met its match via restoration supplies hauled in by mule train—because some special places are worth the extra effort. The Friend's role in Coachella Valley's conservation story also far exceeds the Monument's boundary. Using grants and privately raised funds, the Friends have acquired over 63,000 acres for permanent conservation in support of the Monument, other National Conservation Lands, and the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. Friend's staff and volunteers also play an important role in cleaning up, monitoring, and stewarding these acquired lands.

DESERT MOUNTAINS *(continued)*

This past year has been among the most challenging since the establishment of the Monument. And yet, people kept showing up to support BLM and the management of the Monument. With the support of the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, over 1,200 acres have also been returned to the stewardship of the Aqua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians; the kind of patient, principled work that doesn't make headlines, but changes landscapes.



Friends of Desert Mountains Volunteers *(Friends photo)*



Friends of Desert Mountains Volunteers *(Friends photo)*

Public lands are protected by law, but their future depends on people who show up, not because they are required to, but because they are invested, this place matters to them, and because they are Friends of the land. As the Monument enters its next 25 years, facing climate change, wildfire, and growing visitation, it is certain that management of these special places will be tested again. It always is, but if the last four decades are any indication, the Friends of the Desert Mountains will be there—dust-covered, wide-eyed, and ready to help.

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 Interior Department and BLM have proposed a FY 2027 Budget of \$830.9 million for the BLM Lands and Resources programs, which would represent a 34 percent reduction in funding from FY 2026. The House Appropriations Committee on June 3, 2026, advanced a proposed FY 2027 appropriation of \$1.212 billion for the BLM Lands and Resources programs, which would represent only a four percent reduction in funding from FY 2026. However, even this level of funding is \$82.7 million below the FY 2025 appropriation.

SUMMARY: The FY 2026 Appropriations bill for BLM represented a 2.7 percent reduction in funding from FY 2025 funding levels. However, the FY 2027 proposed Department and BLM budget includes several proposals that would have even greater impacts on BLM. The FY 2027 proposed BLM budget of \$830.9 million for the BLM Lands and Resources programs, which represents a 34 percent reduction in funding from FY 2026 and an overall 36 percent reduction in funding from FY 2025. In addition, the FY 2027 proposed Budget would zero out the Cultural Resources program, Wilderness Management program, and Renewable Energy program. The National Conservation Lands program would see a 76 percent reduction in funding and the Wildlife Habitat Management program would see a 77 percent reduction in funding. These funding reductions would result in significant staffing impacts and resource program impacts.

On another front, Senator Bennet (CO) introduced legislation (S. 4455) that would amend the Congressional Budget Act to ensure that public lands are not sold through any fast-tracked process in any future Budget Reconciliation bill. In addition, Congressman Neguse (CO) introduced legislation (H.R. 8523) that would prohibit the use of reductions in force (RIF) or the involuntary non-performance related separation of BLM employees through the FY 2030 budget cycle.

PLF POSITION: The PLF submitted written testimony to Congress the BLM 2026 Budget to assist in the discussion of funding needs for the public lands. The PLF expects to provide written testimony on the FY 2027 proposed Budget. The PLF will identify those areas that would significantly impact BLM staffing and resource management programs. The PLF has already prepared letters of support for both S. 4455 and H.R. 8523, that relate to funding and staffing issues that would impact the future management of the public lands.

GRAZING REGULATIONS – 43 CFR 4100

STATUS: The BLM on May 12, 2026 published in the Federal Register a Proposed Rule for updates and revisions to the Regulations for Grazing Administration on the public lands (43 CFR Part 4100). The Proposed Rule is available for public review and comment for a 60-day period.

SUMMARY: The BLM administers its grazing program under the regulations at 43 CFR Part 4100. Those regulations were revised in 1995 and again in 2006. However, elements of the 1995 Rule and the entirety of the 2006 Rule were successfully challenged in court and enjoined by the Tenth and Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Because the 2006 Rule remains permanently enjoined, the regulations that are currently in force and which the BLM administers the grazing program are those that largely reflect the outdated 1995 Rule. In addition, Congress in 2014 amended Section 402 of FLPMA to address BLM's environmental reviews with grazing permit renewals, providing for the continuation of the terms and conditions of an expiring or transferred permit for which environmental review has not been completed. The Proposed Rule is intended to align the grazing regulations with current best practices for grazing on the public lands, update the regulations consistent with Court decisions and amendments to Section 402 of FLPMA, and to reflect on recommendations from a GAO report on unauthorized grazing in 2016.

PLF POSITION: The PLF supports updating the current grazing regulations at 43 CFR 4100 to reflect the correct rule and current legislation. **The PLF submitted comments on the regulations during the public scoping period and will be reviewing the Proposed Rule. The regulation update process will ultimately conclude with the publication of a Final Rule.**

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

STATUS: The BLM on May 12, 2026 published a Final Rule that fully rescinds the May 2024 Conservation and Landscape Health Rule (Public Lands Rule). The rescission of the Public Lands Rule became effective 30-days after publication.

SUMMARY: The BLM in February 2025 rescinded an internal policy memorandum (IM 2024-038) 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. 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 fire resources. 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 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*.

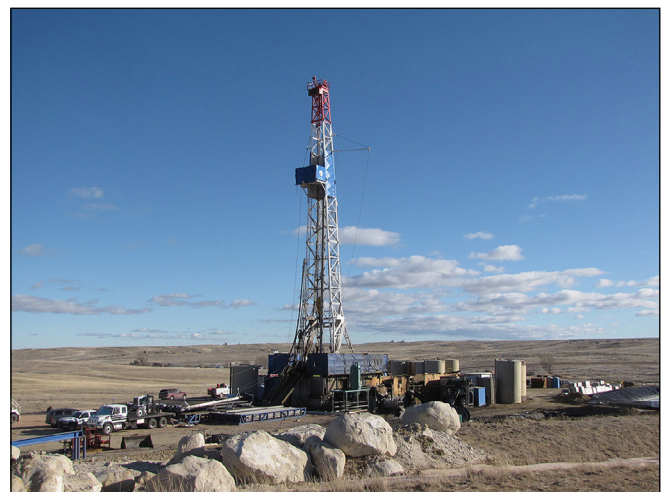
PLF POSITION: The PLF is a member of the Wildfire Resilience Coalition (WFC) which is comprised of a diverse partnership of over 40 organizations including conservation groups, professional societies, tribal interests, wildfire interests, states, counties, universities, timber associations, and others. 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 support for 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 on May 20, 2025 sent a letter to both House and Senate members regarding concerns over the establishment of a Federal Wildland Fire Service and on August 8, 2025 sent a letter to Secretary Burgum expressing opposition to the establishment of a Wildland Fire Service within the Interior Department. The PLF

also on March 19, 2026 signed onto a joint letter with 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 BLM will reassess the Rule. **The BLM on June 24, 2026 published in the Federal Register a Proposed Rule that would modify the previous methane waste prevention regulations to reduce the methane compliance requirements for oil and gas operators and streamline the royalty determinations on lost oil or natural gas. The Proposed Rule is available for public review and comment for a 60-day period.**



Oil & Gas Drill Rig, Wyoming (BLM photo)

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 BLM on June 24, 2026 published in the Federal Register a Proposed Rule that would modify the previous methane waste prevention regulations to reduce the methane compliance requirements for oil and gas operators and streamline the royalty determinations on lost oil or natural gas. The Proposed Rule is available for public review and comment for a 60-day period.**

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 in respect to these rules.

SUMMARY: The existing Methane or Waste Prevention Rule is intended 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 existing Oil and Gas Leasing Rule of 2024 updated the BLM onshore oil and gas leasing regulations to codify provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and implement reforms from the Interior Report on the Federal Oil and Gas Leasing Program (November 2021). The existing Leasing Rule increased royalty rates to 16.67 percent, increased rental rates to \$15 per acre, increased minimum lease bids to \$10 per acre, eliminated non-competitive leasing, reduced the non operational period for idle wells to four years, increased minimum lease bonds to \$150,000, increased minimum statewide bonds to \$500,000, eliminated nationwide bonds, and included other provisions to ensure responsible oil and gas leasing and development on the public lands. **The Proposed Methane Waste Prevention Rule and the Proposed Oil and Gas Leasing Rule would modify and revise the existing regulations to streamline and reduce the regulatory burdens for oil and gas leasing and development on both onshore Federal lands and Indian leases.**

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 Ap-

propriations 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 FY 2025 funding levels. **The Department and BLM proposed FY 2027 budget would provide for an additional 6.8 percent increase in the BLM Oil and Gas program from FY 2026 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 FY 2026 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill 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 President's proposed FY 2027 Budget and BLM's FY 2027 Budget Highlights, however, again propose to zero-out funding for the BLM Renewable Energy program.** 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.

SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS UPDATE

The Social Security Fairness Act was signed into law on January 5, 2025. As per the Social Security Administration’s web site: *The Act ends the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO). These provisions reduced or eliminated the Social Security benefits of over 2.8 million people who receive a pension based on work that was not covered by Social Security (a “non-covered pension”) because they did not pay Social Security taxes. This law increases Social Security benefits for certain types of workers, including some:*

- *Teachers, firefighters, and police officers in many states.*
- *Federal employees covered by the Civil Service Retirement System.*
- *People whose work had been covered by a foreign social security system.*

The take aways are twofold. First if you are receiving an annuity from the Civil Service Retirement System and are also receiving a Social Security benefit because you have at least 40 quarters of eligible work in the private sector, your Social Security benefit is no longer reduced by some 60 percent. You must apply for the increased benefit and may even have to visit a Social Security Administration office. The increase is retroactive.

Second, if your spouse receives a Social Security benefit that is greater than yours, you may now also apply for a spousal benefit. Your spousal benefit will be based on your spouse’s private sector earnings.

For more information on these changes in Social Security benefits that may benefit you, especially those under the Civil Service Retirement System, visit the Social Security Administration web site or search Social Security Fairness Act on the internet.

BLM LEADERSHIP

The Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee on February 25, 2026 held a confirmation hearing for BLM Director nominee Stevan Pearce. The Committee on March 4, 2026 voted to advance the nomination to the full Senate for consideration. The Senate approved the nomination of Stevan Pearce as BLM Director on May 18, 2026.



Stevan Pearce is a former Congressman from New Mexico, who served for 12 years and was Chairman of the House Western Caucus during his term in Congress. He is a former Air Force and commercial airline pilot and former oil and gas industry business owner. He ran for Governor of New Mexico in 2018 but lost to Michelle Lujan Grisham, the State's current Governor. He stepped down in December 2024 as the Chair of the New Mexico Republican Party.

With the continued changes in the leadership positions of BLM, we would like to provide an update on the current leadership, including the State Directors that provide the day-to-day on-the-ground management for the public lands. The following are the current Deputy Directors and the State Directors for each of the BLM State Offices:

Director	Stevan Pearce
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 Heinlein (<i>Acting</i>)
Eastern States Office	Mitchell Leverette
Idaho State Office	Meagan Conry (<i>Acting</i>)
Montana State Office	Jerry Davis (<i>Acting</i>)
Nevada State Office	Justin Abernathy (<i>Acting</i>)
New Mexico State Office	Gera Ashton (<i>Acting</i>)
OR/WA State Office	Kim Prill (<i>Acting</i>)
Utah State Office	Christina Price (<i>Acting</i>)
Wyoming State Office	Kris Kirby (<i>Acting</i>)

PLF MEMBERSHIP

PLF ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES

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

PLF MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Date _____

Amount Enclosed _____

IN MEMORIAM

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, 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)

Gerald “Jerry” L. Jessen on April 28, 2026, in Cheyenne, WY. Jerry was a U.S. Army veteran and served as a paratrooper in the 101st Airborne Division. He graduated from Kansas State University with a degree in Engineering. He began his career with BLM in 1962 as a professional engineer in Casper, WY and later moved to Cheyenne. At the time of his retirement in 1998, he was the BLM Deputy State Director. He was named Engineer of the Year in 1986 by the National Society of Professional Engineers and volunteered his engineering expertise on several local community projects. He served as President of the WY Board of Public Utilities for 12 years and was also General Chairman of Cheyenne Frontier Day from 1989 to 1991.

James S. Lambert on April 2, 2026, in Cheyenne, WY. Jim was a U.S. Navy veteran and served during the Korean War. He attended Stout State College (University of Wisconsin) and later earned a degree in Forest Conservation from the University of Montana. During college he was seasonally employed by the National Park Service in Glacier and Teton

National Parks and was also involved with National Wilderness studies in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. He began his 29 year career with BLM in 1960 and worked in Montana, Nevada, and Wyoming. He was an Area Manager in Battle Mountain, NV and later became an Outdoor Recreation Planner in Casper, WY. He was also a coal EIS project manager in Cheyenne, WY. He retired in 1989.

Bruce McGarvey on June 12, 2026, in Medford, OR. During Bruce's long BLM career he specialized in easements, cadastral survey, and rights-of-way. As early as 1967, he was involved in BLM Easement and ROW training programs at the Oregon State Office and later led professional resource management and easement negotiation projects. After retirement, he taught community courses on understanding legal land records and reading survey maps.

Jon Menten on May 31, 2026, in Coos Bay, OR. Jon was a BLM Forester in Medford and Coos Bay Districts.

***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.*

DONATIONS*

MEMORIAL DONATIONS		GENERAL/ADVOCACY FUND		
RECEIVED FROM	IN MEMORY OF	Tom Allen	Bob Anderson	David Mari
Tom Allen	Dee LeBarron	Mat	Mary Jo	Cynthia
Mat Millenbach	Lou Bellisi	Millenbach	Rugwell	Russell
Dave and Judy Miller	Shela McFarlin	Robin and Ryszard Chetkowski		
		Dave and Judy Miller		
		Gregg and Mary Simmons		

* This list reflects donations received during the period of April 1, 2026 to June 30, 2026. Donations received after this period will be reported in the next edition of the **Monitor**.

You can make a donation by credit card on our website at www.publicland.org, or by check sent to the Public Lands Foundation, P.O. Box 7226, Arlington, VA 22207. 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.

You can also make a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) directly to the PLF from an eligible individual retirement account (IRA). The PLF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization and your donations are tax-deductible to the maximum extent permitted under the law. **When making a qualified charitable distribution (QCD), please advise your IRA account manager to also provide your direct personal address to the PLF so that we can acknowledge your charitable donation.**

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. This fund raising campaign supports the advocacy efforts of the Public Lands Foundation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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. Comments should be limited to no more than 500 words in length. In addition, members are encouraged to use the bod@publicland.org e-mail address to communicate with the PLF Board.

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.



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