

Your Lands, Your Wildlife

Common Sense Conservation for Our Wildlife Heritage



For more than 100 years, America's federal lands have played a vital role in defining our nation's character, and shaping our culture, economy and natural environment. America's four major federal land systems – the Bureau of Land Management's lands, national forest system, national parks and national wildlife refuges – comprise over 672 million acres of land. This means that an astounding 30 percent of our nation's total land base, an area slightly larger than Alaska and Texas combined, belongs to you and your fellow citizens. These majestic lands spread like a patchwork quilt across America – from the peaks of the Rocky Mountains to the valleys of the Appalachians, from the forests of New England to the California desert – that embodies our natural heritage and sustains our future.

The federal lands belong to the American people and generate an amazing range of benefits shared by all Americans. As owners, we all share responsibility for the stewardship of these lands. Two of the major land systems – the U.S. Forest Service's national forests and grasslands and the lands of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) – are specifically managed to provide Americans with a balanced array of natural, social and economic benefits. As such, Americans receive public goods from these "multiple-use" lands, including:

- **Countless opportunities for adventure.** Federal lands provide unparalleled opportunities for your adventures – camping, backcountry hiking, kayaking, rafting and canoeing, hunting, angling and wildlife viewing. The possibilities are endless. These physically healthy recreation opportunities also provide social and economic benefits to local communities. According to the Outdoor Industry Foundation, outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy.
- **A variety of breathtaking landscapes home to the most diverse plants and wildlife on Earth.** Federal lands provide habitat for a myriad of imperiled and common plants and animals. As the most ecologically diverse nation on Earth, America's varied climate, topography and geology sustain a rich tapestry of life, much of which is found nowhere else on the planet. A full one-third of the world's mammals occur only here.
- **Clean water.** Approximately 3,400 towns and cities depend on national forest watersheds for their public water supplies. About 60 million Americans live in communities that draw source water from national forests and grasslands. This water is not only used for consumption, but also for agriculture and industry.
- **Clean air and a national insurance policy against the uncertain effects of climate change.** Natural landscapes store carbon dioxide, which helps with global warming, and also provide sanctuary for wildlife responding to the pressures of a changing climate.
- **Economic goods and services.** Forest Service and BLM lands provide an array of socioeconomic benefits through the production of timber and wood products, forage for grazing, and diverse energy sources from natural gas to solar and wind. When produced in a sustainable manner, these goods and services will provide jobs and other social benefits for generations of Americans.

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Multiple-use management seeks to meet the nation's demands for timber production, energy and mineral development, and livestock grazing while ensuring that fish and wildlife resources are protected, recreational opportunities are guaranteed, watersheds are safeguarded, and historical, cultural and scientific values are preserved. Unfortunately, the Bush administration has undermined the balance between natural, social and economic uses of our national forests, grasslands and BLM lands. In fact, the scales have been heavily skewed towards damaging extractive activities. From wildlife to clean water to the provision of opportunities for world-class recreation, the Bush administration has unnecessarily threatened our public resources.



Common sense wildlife management

The U.S. Forest Service is governed by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), which is clarified and supported by administrative regulations. In 1982, the Reagan administration enacted a simple approach to managing wildlife on our national forests, the “population viability rule” – dubbed the “Reagan wildlife standard” – that required the Forest Service to maintain healthy populations of wildlife on the national forests and grasslands. This commonsense policy made sure that plants and animals were accounted for when each of the 175 national forests and grasslands conducted their large-scale and long-term planning exercises. The Reagan wildlife standard provided the Forest Service with a balanced, science-based approach



for managing wildlife. The standard acted like an insurance policy – by accounting for wildlife early-on in the planning process, the policy allowed for the consistent production of natural, social and economic benefits. This wildlife standard was, for the most part, successful. It allowed common species, including game species, to thrive, and kept more sensitive at-risk species off the endangered species list, avoiding the significant social and economic costs of those listings.

The Need for Permanent Protections

Despite the success of the Reagan wildlife standard in sustaining wildlife across our public lands, the policy was inherently vulnerable because presidential administrations can prescribe administrative policies, for the benefit of the American people and wildlife as Reagan did--or for the benefit of industry lobbyists and development interests as the Bush administration did. Since taking office, the Bush administration has aggressively worked to eliminate the Reagan wildlife standard, disregarding the bipartisan cooperation and sound scientific underpinnings that form the basis of the policy, and over the objections of conservation groups, sportsmen and outdoor businesses.

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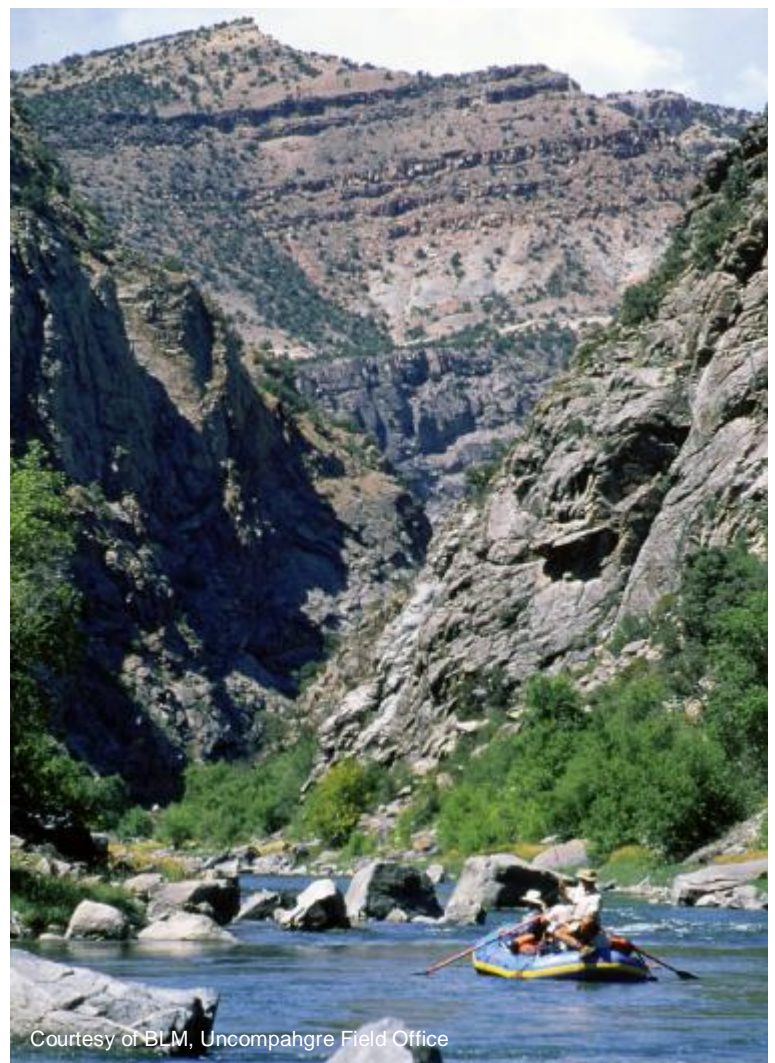


Did you know?

- The U. S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management administer 449 million acres of land – 20 percent of the land area of the United States.
- While in effect, the Reagan wildlife standard conserved many at-risk species such as the pine marten, fisher, wolverine, swift fox, sage grouse, Colorado River cutthroat trout, harlequin duck and desert bighorn sheep.
- Outdoor recreation contributes a whopping \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy, supporting 6.5 million jobs across the country.

The mistaken policies and industry favoritism of the Bush administration need to be remedied – the wildlife policy should be reinstated on Forest Service lands. However, the time is right to modernize wildlife policy and management on our public lands for the 21st century. As we all know, wildlife know no boundaries, and require common sense protections beyond the national forest lands. For example, pronghorn antelope in the Rockies have been migrating along the same path for nearly 6,000 years. Today, the pronghorn faces a myriad of obstacles and laws, as it travels through Forest Service and BLM lands.

Science-based wildlife conservation measures need to be extended to the BLM, which has never operated under wildlife management requirements similar to those of the Forest Service. The BLM does have policies in place to help prevent species from being listed under the Endangered Species Act, but these policies are vague at best. They do not confer specific responsibilities on the BLM, leaving the agency wide discretion in how to manage the fish and wildlife for which it is responsible. The importance of BLM lands for wildlife and habitat is increasingly being recognized, particularly in light of climate change. With the recent emphasis on energy exploration and production on public lands in the American West, BLM's lack of clear safeguards is resulting in dramatic negative consequences for fish and wildlife.



Courtesy of BLM, Uncompahgre Field Office

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The solution

Given emerging controversies surrounding oil and gas development, the potential impacts of massive western population growth, increased understanding of the significant effects of climate change on wildlife and the dramatic impacts of unsustainable uses of public lands on wildlife, it is imperative that fundamental protections be in place that ensure the persistence of healthy populations of wildlife on all of our public lands.

Outlined to the right are the key elements of a policy plan that would require both the Forest Service and BLM to maintain viable wildlife populations on their lands and require, to the extent practicable, all land management agencies to coordinate toward this end. Enactment of this policy plan would update the strong wildlife protection requirements found in the National Forest Management Act's 1982 Reagan wildlife standard. The plan would eliminate the uncertainty in wildlife management created by differing approaches to land planning in differing political climates, and extend this critically needed protection to BLM lands.



Courtesy of BLM



This forward-thinking, proactive policy plan would update wildlife management to reflect the “state of the art” in applied conservation science, including:

- Requiring science-based monitoring that is methodologically sound and can be readily implemented by the agencies. The plan would use efficient methods of habitat monitoring coupled with targeted species surveys, avoiding costly and burdensome surveys for all species. This method would be equally protective as, but more efficient than, the Reagan wildlife standard.
- The policy plan will require federal agencies to coordinate wildlife management across jurisdictional boundaries, to standardize wildlife data collection and to share information, resulting in more efficient management of natural resources.
- The policy plan recognizes that the sustainable provision of multiple-use benefits from our public lands depends on accounting for wildlife populations during the planning process, before moving forward with development activities.

Healthy wildlife populations on federal lands indicate overall land health. Healthy federal lands provide numerous benefits to the American public, including: unparalleled recreation opportunities, a clean water supply, clean air and insurance for the uncertain effects of climate change. The time is now for a balanced shift in public lands wildlife policy that ensures permanent protections for your lands, and your wildlife.