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**RECREATION MANAGEMENT BY THE BLM
A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Outdoor Recreation:
Promise And Peril in The New West

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Natural Resources Law Center
University of Colorado
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Boulder, Colorado

RECREATION MANAGEMENT BY THE BLM: A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Ann Morgan, State Director, Colorado BLM

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, is entrusted with administering 264 million acres of Public Lands located primarily in the 12 Western States, including Alaska. In Colorado, BLM manages 8.3 million acres of surface estate. These lands range from alpine tundra, colorful canyons, and mesas in the southwest to the open plains in the eastern part of the state. Originally, these lands were valued principally for the commodities extracted from them; today, the public also prizes them for their recreation opportunities and the natural, historical, and cultural resources they contain.

I. RECREATION ASSETS

A. Cultural, Historic and Paleontological resources

The diversity and wide range of cultural, historic and paleontological resources found on Public Lands managed by BLM in Colorado provide extensive opportunities for recreation use. World class archaeological sites associated with the Anasazi culture, are located in SW Colorado. Highlights include the Anasazi Heritage Center and Lowry Ruins near Dolores, Colorado. The Heritage Center is an outstanding curatorial museum and interpretive center and has a very active cultural education program. To the north and east lies the San Juan Triangle, an area of spectacular alpine scenery colored by spectacular wildflowers and remnants from Colorado's historic mining past.

BLM public lands are also home to several world class dinosaur areas. Most noteworthy are the Rabbit Valley Research Natural Area near Grand Junction, and the Garden Park Fossil Area near Canon City. Working with the Garden Park Paleontological Society, BLM, and local entrepreneurs, the community has built a "Dinosaur Depot" visitor museum in Canon City and has plans to build a full-scale visitor center in the historic Garden Park area. BLM is also cooperating with Grand Junction area museums for paleo resource management.

B. Types of Recreation Opportunities/Niches: How do Public Lands Fit within Available Markets?

A Longwoods International Inc. report, completed for the Colorado tourism industry, reveals how BLM public lands fit into Colorado's travel and tourism market. Due to voters' defeat of the Colorado tourism promotion tax, a 1991 statewide study was latest done. Results show that Colorado's largest recreation and tourism markets are:

1st: Visiting friends and relatives

Front Range metropolitan areas are within easy drive of BLM public lands, and many of Colorado's rural communities are surrounded by public lands. When

friends and relatives visit, we take them to public lands and show off our state.

2nd Touring

Driving through the mountains to enjoy the scenery on back country and other scenic byways is how many people visit BLM managed public lands from behind the windshield.

3rd Outdoors

Camping, hunting, hiking, fishing, river rafting, mountain biking, or exploring ancient ruins on BLM managed lands all fit within this market segment.

4th Local Excursion

Taking an overnight trip within 100 miles of home and enjoying a variety of leisure activities describes more distant public lands recreation visits.

Longwoods further noted, however, that Colorado's four most marketable products include Touring and Outdoors (above), plus both Winter and Country Resorts. The reason is that these four sectors are twice as large for Colorado as for the remainder of the nation as a whole.

C. Types of Recreation Experiences and Benefits (what you experience/achieve, not what you do)

BLM public lands recreation opportunities add value to people's lives. The BLM is beginning to manage for these value-added products, called benefits. Benefits consist of desired psychological experiences and of other improved conditions to the lives of individuals, households and communities, economies, and the environment itself. For example:

Psychological Experiences:	Other Benefits:	
Enjoying learning outdoor skills	Personal:	Improved physical health Restored mind from unwanted stress Greater sense of personal wellness Spiritual growth
Enjoying frequent exercise		Improved understanding of the rural-urban interface
Meeting desired challenges	Social:	Greater cultivation of outdoor-oriented lifestyles Better community integration Improved family solidarity
Enjoying the closeness of family and friends		Improved economic stability Greater work productivity
Enjoying exploration and discovery	Economic:	
Appreciating unconfined open space		Environmental: Improved relationship with natural world Greater environmental stewardship
Feeling good about being		

II. WHAT IS THE DEMAND?

A. New west trends

Bureau of Census data and information contained in *Atlas of the New West: Portrait of a Changing Region*, by Patricia Nelson Limerick and Charles Wilkinson at the University of Colorado at Boulder reveal significant changes in Colorado's social and cultural landscape.

Rural Population

The West is far more urbanized than the rest of the nation. Nowhere is this more readily illustrated than Colorado. The entire Front Range, from Wyoming to New Mexico is now less than 50 percent rural as are neighboring gateway communities leading into the mountains.

Net Migration

In Colorado, the net in-migration pattern follows the urban Front Range, extends along the mountainous I-70 corridor and along a route from Denver southwest.

Limerick and Wilkinson observe that rural areas of the West are developing more rapidly than its metropolitan areas. Rural counties western counties have grown at twice the rate of the nation over the past 20 years. And those containing federally designated wilderness grew even more rapidly.

Public Lands and Recreation Dependency

Roughly one-third of Colorado's 60 million acres is comprised of public lands, the vast majority administered by USDA Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Eighty-eight percent of the nation's federal public lands lying outside of the State of Alaska occur within the 11 western states. Counties where the recreation industry contributes at least 10 percent of total earnings roughly coincide with Colorado's high country. Limerick and Wilkinson observe that fewer than 1 percent of western employment is owing to the mining industry and only .06 percent to ranching.

Colorado's most recent Business and Economic Outlook Forum shows that Colorado's second most significant economic contributor is the "Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, and Conventions" sector.

B. Recreation and tourism demands

Of Westerners reporting recreation related trips, 65 percent used public agency managed sites. Within the last year, one in four Americans took an outdoor recreation vacation, and 28 percent of all Americans visited a federal recreation site. Results of the 1994-95 National Study on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE, USDA Forest Service) show outdoor recreation participation nationally and for four distinct regions of the west:

- For the Northern Rockies: Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming
- For the Pacific Northwest: Washington, Oregon, and Alaska
- For the Pacific Southwest: California and Nevada
- And for the Four Corners States: Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado

(1) Activity Rankings:

Most regions share in common, with each other and with the nation as a whole, the same top five activities: Walking, Visiting a Beach or Waterside, Family Social Gathering, Sightseeing, and Picnicking.

Participation in these top five activities for each of four western regions ranks about the same it does nationally. However, camping and hiking are substantially more popular in the West than for the nation as a whole. Interregionally, wildlife viewing is noticeably more popular in the Northern Rocky Mountains than it is for all other western regions.

(2) Total Participation by Activity:

Each of the top five activities may involve public lands. Only two of the top ten preclude a providing role for public lands. Although Attending Outdoor Sports Events is big business, it is still outranked by the top five activities nationally. Within the Colorado region, it even falls behind Visiting Nature Centers.

In general recreation participation for these ten activities in the West comprises about 18 percent of the national total. Among the four western regions, activity participation in each the Pacific Northwest and the Four Corners states is about four times that of the Northern Rocky Mountain Region. In turn, participation for the Pacific Southwest is about three times that of either the Pacific Northwest or Four Corners states.

C. Emerging Recreation Markets

(1) Trends:

For activities addressed in both 1982-83 and 1994-95 NSRE studies, one of the most significant trends is a decline in consumptive wildlife use with an

accompanying increase in non-consumptive wildlife viewing activities. Another is the substantial increases in Hiking, Backpacking, both Primitive and Developed Area Camping, Downhill Skiing, Off-Road Driving, Sightseeing, Swimming, and Snowmobiling. Relative to the higher ranked activities, participant numbers are smaller, but the rate of growth demands that public land managers take a closer look at these activities.

(2) Related Activity Groupings for the Four Corners States:

To put things in yet another perspective, NSRE researchers grouped recreation by activity types within each of the four western regions. The prominence of viewing activities resembles earlier tourism studies completed by Longwoods International for the previous Colorado Tourism Board. Two additional considerations make this category doubly important. First is its tremendous rate of growth, and second is the significant decrease in consumptive wildlife use. BLM's role in providing viewing opportunities is both distinctive and significant. BLM is also a major partner in at least six of Colorado's 21 scenic and back country byways.

Among natural resource agencies providing for fitness activities, ranked third in this region, BLM's mountain biking trails play a significant role. Moving to adopt an expanded benefits-based recreation management framework, BLM is beginning to explicitly target fitness outcomes. For example, we have targeted "Improved physical fitness/better health maintenance" on the Mary's and Lions Loop segment of Kokopelli's trail in the Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge area near Grand Junction.

(3) Participation by Recreation Activity Groupings for the Four Corners States:

There is an overwhelming popularity of activities within the Viewing and Social categories, especially when compared to the more traditional outdoor recreation activity categories. In second place and too easily overlooked are the distinctively social activities--including Picnicking and Family Social Gatherings. BLM recreation related programs are shifting to respond to enormous demand within these viewing and socially-oriented markets.

While most activities significant for the public lands within the Fitness and Outdoor Adventure groupings are only about one-fourth as popular as the top Viewing and Social activity categories, some deserve more attention. The first two are hiking and bicycling. Their significance lies in the fact that about twice as many people hike and bike as engage in any other Outdoor Adventure pursuit. In addition, hiking increased nearly 100 percent in the twelve-year period between NSRE studies. A 1997 Colorado River Outfitters Association shows that commercial river rafting user days on river segments within or originating within Colorado more than doubled from 1988 to 1997.

While less significant in terms of overall participant numbers, other activities within the Outdoor Adventure and Camping categories warrant special attention by BLM. These include Backpacking, Off-Road Driving, and Developed Area Camping. One other product in this lineup especially significant for Colorado BLM is Rock Climbing, despite a relatively small number of participants. The reason is that within this niche we have at least two world-class climbing areas: the Shelf Road near Canon City and Penitente Canyon near Monte Vista.

III. BLM RESPONSE TO THE DEMANDS

A. Benefits based management

Case Study: A benefits-based management plan has recently been approved for the Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge ecosystem encompassing a wide variety of settings that provide a great diversity of benefits to users near a growing community that prides itself on its physical setting and quality of life.

A recreation study of both visitor and resident customers (1) provided baseline information about visitor use; (2) identified both visitor and community resident benefit preferences for the area, and (3) identified perceptions of visitors and community leaders regarding benefits derived from the area.

The management plan targets activity, psychological experience, and other benefit products for eight different zones, each appealing to a different niche within the Colorado recreation-tourism market. Managers will be using benefits measures both to manage and market the area as well as to monitor and evaluate collaborating providers' progress in meeting these objectives.

B. Community based efforts

BLM land managers and communities must work together to plan for and provide the kinds of recreation services that fit the community, the resources and the expectations of the visitors.

Outdoor Visitor Needs:	Local Community Provides:	Local Businesses Provide:	Land Mgrs. Provide:
-----	-----	-----	-----
Healthy environment	X		X
Visual amenities	X		X
Safety services	X	X	X
Uncrowded experience		X	X
Transportation services	X	X	
Shopping		X	
Lodging		X	
Restaurants		X	

Information on area	X	X	X
Recreation infrastructure	X	X	X
Outfitter/guides/operators		X	

Specific examples were cited, including:

- Gold Belt Tour Back Country Community Based Management Committee
- Grand Junction Visitors and Convention Bureau
- Commercial River Studies
- Tennessee Pass Rails to Trails Effort
- Alpine Loop Community-Based Visitor and Resident Recreation/Tourism Study

C. Partnerships

BLM and Colorado State Parks are managing the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area, 148 miles of the most heavily used river in the West. The Garden Park Paleontology Society works with BLM to manage the Garden Park Fossil Area near Canon City. So does the Museum of Colorado and “Dinamation” at several paleo sites near Grand Junction.

D. Interpretation and Education Examples

Examples were chosen for receiving national awards or for their unique contribution to interpretation.

- Cedar Mountain, Little Snake Resource Area
Interpretation at this project was part of an over all site development effort including a watchable wildlife area.
- Windy Gap - Kremmling Resource Area
Portions of the interpretive exhibits at this site is part of a Watchable Wildlife site.
- Steel Bridge Interpretive Site - Canyon City District
The National Register listed historic, steel bridge interpretive site along the Gold Belt Tour Back Country Byway overlooks the only remaining bridge of the Florence and Cripple Creek narrow gauge railroad.
- Anasazi Heritage Center - Montrose District
A newly completed interactive, virtual reality CD-ROM “People In the Past” is a big hit among students, teachers and professional archeologists.
- Storm King Fourteen Memorial trail - Grand Junction District
In memory of the 14 fire fighters that were killed in the July 6, 1994 South Canyon Fire on Storm King Mountain, 7 miles west of Glenwood Springs, BLM has developed the Storm King Fourteen Memorial Trail.

E. RAC Recreation Guidelines

Consequent to the February 3, 1997, approval of Colorado's "Standards for Public Land Health", describing desired natural conditions for sustaining and managing public land health, BLM's Colorado Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) are working on developing guidelines for recreation use in conformance with the standards. All three RACs are finalizing these recreation guidelines, working with the BLM managers and staff to ensure the actions will be implementable.

F. Fees

The BLM in Colorado is considering additional user fees to supplement, not replace, annual funding appropriations. In Fiscal Year 1997, well over 3,000 recreation permits were issued for use on BLM lands in Colorado. This includes fees associated with SRPs for dispersed use as well as Recreation Use Permits at developed sites. Amounts charged are designed to reflect a fair return to the government. Three percent of gross receipts from commercial permits going to the US Treasury. Charges for campgrounds and day use make up most of the developed recreation fee sites, with an average daily site charge of five dollars.

IV. CHALLENGES

While the demand for recreation on Public Lands continues to increase, funding has not kept pace with the rising costs of managing recreation sites and providing services that the public expects. BLM's funding increased by four percent in Fiscal Year 1997, but the Bureau's principal appropriation -- Management of Land and Resources (including recreation programs) -- increased only about one-and-one-half percent from 1996 levels. Future budgets for the BLM are also projected to be flat or declining, especially when inflation is factored in.

In recognition of this challenge, caused by increasing public use and decreasing agency capability, the BLM has developed a Strategic Plan to respond to this situation as well as to address other agency-wide needs. The Strategic Plan, built on BLM's *Blueprint for the Future*, is designed to advance into the future the Bureau's mission "**Sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations**".

It is organized around five *Blueprint* goals, many of which affect recreation:

1. Serve current and future publics -- describes the wide variety of goods and services the BLM provides to the American people.
2. Restore and maintain the health of the land -- outlines what the BLM is doing to restore and maintain the health of the public lands.
3. Promote collaborative management -- focuses on building effective partnerships with public land users, adjacent landowners, other agencies and government entities, and nongovernmental

organizations.

4. Improve business practices -- outlines strategies to improve business practices.

5. Improve human resources management -- addresses the human resources management arena.

BLM is proud to be a manager of such awesome natural resources found in Colorado. We look forward to the future with confidence that together with other partners we can deliver the kinds of quality recreation benefits that the public is seeking, while protecting the environment.