

Connecting with Communities



Colorado - Photo by Tyler Stabileford ©



How Is This Strategy for the BLM's Recreation Program a New Approach?

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages recreation resources and visitor services to offer the greatest benefits possible to individuals and communities and, as envisioned in this strategy, to better enable communities to achieve their own desired social, economic, and environmental outcomes. BLM public lands—once described as “the lands nobody wanted”—are now recognized as America’s Great Outdoors, a “Backyard to Backcountry” treasure. They are uniquely accessible. More than 120 urban centers and thousands of rural towns are located within 25 miles of BLM lands.

BLM lands fill a distinctive niche in the federal recreation marketplace—one that offers a competitive advantage for communities and businesses. Moreover, the close proximity of varied stakeholders to BLM lands creates many opportunities for the BLM and communities to collaborate, set mutual objectives for proposed recreation opportunities, and pool resources toward shared goals.

The BLM recognizes that it is part of a greater whole. Public lands are **connected to** and **integrated with** communities—not federally designated islands separated from them. This recreation strategy is different because it focuses on proactive engagement with communities,

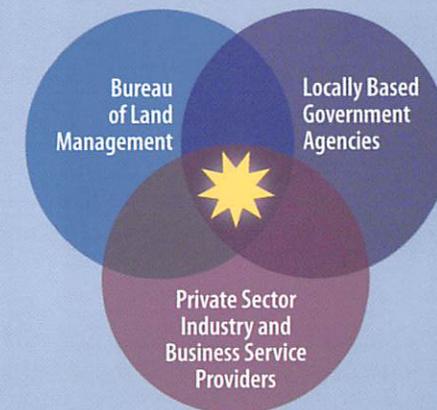
locally based government agencies, and service provider businesses, and emphasizes benefits from the perspective of **community networks of service providers**. It is not business as usual; it is a serious effort to reposition resources (recreation setting management and visitor services, program funding, operational knowledge and skills, and the BLM culture and brand) in support of **community values** while optimizing benefits for the public.

The recreating public has steadily grown, and visitors to public lands now number about 59 million. It is paramount that the BLM and community networks of service providers plan and work efficiently together on a routine basis to help one another be as successful as possible, especially during difficult economic times.

What Are Community Networks of Service Providers?

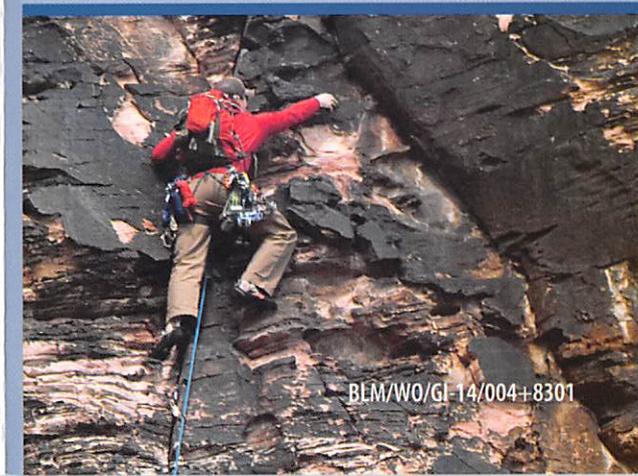
They are the driving forces in our cities and towns. These networks include locally based government agencies at all levels (city, county, tribal, state, and federal). Private sector industries and businesses are also key service providers, including outfitters, tour operators, lodging, restaurants, nature and youth centers, chambers of commerce, tourism industry associations, sporting goods and retail stores, and other nongovernmental organizations.

Vision: By increasing and improving collaboration with community networks of service providers, the BLM will help communities produce greater well-being and socioeconomic health and will deliver outstanding recreation experiences to visitors while sustaining the distinctive character of public lands recreation settings.



Locally Based Government Agencies include municipal and county governments, the National Association of Counties, tribal governments, state and regional agencies, other federal agencies, schools, etc.

Private Sector Industry and Business includes outfitters and tour operators, lodging and restaurants, nature and youth centers, chambers of commerce, tourism industry associations, sporting goods and retail, other nongovernmental organizations, etc.



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What Steps Will the BLM Take To Reposition Its Resources Externally?

An important goal of the BLM's overall national strategy is to "Be a Good Neighbor." Toward this end, the BLM recreation program intends to develop closer ties to and accountability with the communities that the agency serves. The BLM will seek out and develop sustained relationships with service providers, engaging productively with representatives, listening well to understand community values and quality of life issues, and helping identify recreation opportunities that not only deliver outstanding recreation experiences to visitors and preserve the distinctive character of public lands recreation settings, but also respond to the specific desires and capacity of service providers (as consistent with federal law and policy).

Long-term land management plans will be flexible enough to change as the needs of communities and the demands of the public change. Under an outcome-focused approach, the BLM will leverage financial resources to support key needs of network providers—for example, to provide important portal facilities and maintain top-priority sites and services. To make the most of investments in recreation, the BLM will assign priority to opportunities

that support the recreation needs of both visitors and local residents.

What Steps Will the BLM Take To Reposition Its Resources Internally?

There are many things that the BLM can and will do internally to support this national strategy. First, the agency will devote resources to building employee skills and knowledge with respect to community partnerships. Agency recruitment, retention, and training will seek to build on existing workforce strengths; mentoring and knowledge-sharing of best practices beyond the agency's administrative boundaries will enable the BLM to capitalize further on current expertise in community relations.

Equally important is the need to stay up-to-date about the interests of service providers and visitors. Ongoing discussions with representatives of community networks will help the BLM maintain relevant and responsive partnerships. The BLM will also use in-depth visitor assessments to evaluate and measure how well partnerships are meeting the public's desired outcomes, and then adjust its management practices as necessary. Inventory records and data will be maintained so that

they are accurate and current and tied to nationally set standards, to better enable decisionmakers at all levels to develop useful policies and actions.

The BLM will use print as well as electronic and social media to market recreation opportunities and share information with the public as effectively as possible. Community service providers are often better able than the BLM to tailor and market messages to specific audiences. Therefore, the BLM will engage the creativity of individuals and organizations that can measure and describe the benefits of recreation on public lands effectively to these audiences.

Similarly, the BLM hopes that by working together creatively, community networks and the BLM may find previously untapped sources of funding that will help sustain and support local communities. The BLM will continue to rely on appropriated funds to maintain sites but will target both public and private funding to priority sites and services, as these are determined through collaboration with community networks of service providers. The agency will continue to seek operational efficiencies to realize cost savings and will use fee revenues to improve recreation opportunities at the sites, and in or near the communities, where the fees are collected.

In July 2013, Secretary Sally Jewell outlined six priorities for the Department of the Interior:

- Celebrating and Enhancing America's Great Outdoors
- Strengthening Tribal Nations
- Powering the Future
- Engaging the Next Generation
- Ensuring Sustainable, Secure Water Supplies
- Building a Landscape-Level Understanding

The BLM's Recreation & Visitor Services Strategy supports all of these priorities.

