

TESTIMONY OF ELENA DALY, VICE-PRESIDENT FOR DC AFFAIRS,
PUBLIC LANDS FOUNDATION
THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT
AND RELATED AGENCIES; COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS;
ATTENTION: OUTSIDE WITNESS TESTIMONY
FISCAL YEAR 2013 BUDGET- BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

March 22, 2012

MR. CHAIRMAN:

We thank you for this opportunity to present your committee with our views regarding the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) budget request for FY 2013. As a national, non-profit organization with more than 700 members, comprised principally of retired, but still dedicated, BLM employees, the Public Lands Foundation (PLF) has a unique body of experience, expertise and knowledge of public land management. As retirees, we believe we offer an objective and non-bureaucratic view of what is currently happening on the National System of Public Lands (NSPL). The PLF supports the BLM and its programs, but we are independent in our views and requests. We strive to improve the effectiveness of the BLM by 1) encouraging professionalism of its employees, 2) increasing the public's understanding of and support for the proper management of the NSPL, and 3) promoting proper scientific management of lands administered by the BLM.

Overview

Some of the most significant management challenges for the BLM stem from rapid population and urban growth in the West and accompanying increased demands for access and use of the NSPL. The BLM's customers are as diverse as the natural resources the Bureau manages.

The public lands provide the Nation with opportunities for expanding the development of renewable energy as well as traditional needs for oil, natural gas, coal, non-energy minerals, grazing land and timber. Recreation, wildlife, wild horses, cultural resources and special places are significant attributes of those lands as well.

Management activities contribute to the vitality of State and local economies, generating an expected \$4.5 billion in revenues for 2012, mostly from energy development.

Budget Overview

The PLF recognizes the reality of funding constraints and the need to reduce the Nation's budget deficit. In general, we feel the Administration is seeking a very constrained budget in consideration of the fiscal issues being faced by the Congress and the Administration. In that light, PLF is pleased with several aspects of the overall budget request for the BLM. In particular we are pleased to see increases in several important areas, the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, the New Energy Frontier Initiative, and Sage Grouse Conservation.

The America's Great Outdoors Initiative would provide funding for some of BLM's most underfunded programs—Recreation, Cultural Resources and the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). The NLCS is unique and composed of incredible landscapes within the BLM's National System of Public Lands, which have been designated for their outstanding cultural, ecological and scientific values. These areas range from red-rock deserts, rocky coasts and deep river canyons to high mountains and arctic tundra. Management of the NLCS has long been underfunded.

We believe that BLM's energy programs need to be fully funded. These programs generate the bulk of receipts from the public lands, can have significant impacts on the ground and should be primarily funded from appropriations or the receipts generated by the leases. Increased Oil and Gas Inspections are important and must be funded, but we are very concerned that some of the new fees being proposed are coming ahead of the actual legislative proposals, where the program changes could be fully vetted. Of particular concern is "production accountability" to ensure that all producers of energy or minerals under the Mineral Leasing Act and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act are accurately reporting their production to the United States. More funding for this purpose will mean more oversight and more money to the U.S. Treasury.

The potential listing of the Sage Grouse as an endangered species has major implications for energy development and other uses of the BLM public lands. It is essential that the BLM's funding increase be supported so that it can continue to make progress in preventing the need to list the Sage Grouse.

We believe the Abandoned Mine Lands fee combined with the proposed budget increase will provide a process to begin reclaiming both the safety and environmental hazards that remain after over 150 years of hard-rock mining on millions of acres in the West.

We are also pleased to see increases for land acquisition, renewable energy, resource management planning, coal management, and, other mineral resource management programs. We are also pleased to see the Secretary's proposal to reauthorize the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA) and to allow lands identified in newer BLM land use plans as suitable for disposal to be sold using FLTFA authority.

We are pleased that in recent testimony before the Congress, the Secretary announced a scaled back proposal for the realignment of functions of the Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation and Enforcement and the BLM. There simply was too much opposition to this effort.

However, we have a number of concerns with other parts of this budget proposal.

Rangeland Management Program

We are very concerned about this program. We know that administrative costs are being driven up by numerous factors, not the least of which is the burdensome cost of litigation. While we support BLM's proposed pilot grazing administrative processing fee of \$1 per animal unit month to assist the BLM in processing permits, we are very concerned with the proposed reduction in the Rangeland Management Program for administration of livestock grazing. The reduction far exceeds the increased revenue from the pilot program and will deeply impair the BLM's ability to meet its legal requirements on the ground. We believe funding for this program should be restored.

Alaska Conveyance

The reduction of \$12.4 million from the Alaska Conveyance Program will be devastating to the BLM in Alaska and the U.S. Government's commitment to the State of Alaska, the Native Corporations and individual native allottees to transfer lands that have been promised to them for over 40

years. This would be roughly a 20 percent reduction in land transfer capability and will result in reductions in force and the loss of many 638 Survey Contracts for many small villages in Alaska.

Wild Horses

While we are pleased that the Administration has requested sufficient funds to support efforts for this controversial program, we remain dismayed at the seemingly unsolvable issues that continue to haunt efforts to maintain healthy horses on healthy ranges. Congress must step in at some point to write more effective legislation and provide specific guidance, particularly to resolve the issue of spending many millions of dollars maintaining unadoptable wild horses. It can't continue in this manner much longer!

Mr. Chairman, we hope these comments and concerns assist you in budget deliberations for the FY 2012 budget for the BLM. We remain sincere in our efforts to assure proper management of the National System of Public Lands.

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