



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
**BUREAU OF LAND  
MANAGEMENT (/)**

(/)



## HISTORY OF BLM



### NATIONAL HISTORY

With historical roots dating back to the earliest days of the nation, the BLM administers the lands that remain from America's original "public domain." Created in 1946 through a government reorganization during the Truman Administration, the BLM is the successor to the General Land Office (established in 1812) and the U.S. Grazing Service (originally called the Division of Grazing and renamed in 1939).

This year (2016), the BLM is commemorating two milestone events: its 70th anniversary as an Interior Department agency, and the 40th anniversary of the principal law defining its mission: the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, commonly referred to by its acronym of FLPMA.

As the manager of more land (245 million surface acres or one-tenth of America's land base) and more subsurface mineral estate (700 million acres) than any other government agency, the BLM carries out a dual mandate under FLPMA: that of managing public land for multiple uses (such as energy development, livestock grazing, mining, timber harvesting, and outdoor recreation) while conserving natural, historical, and cultural resources (such as wilderness areas, wild horse and wildlife habitat, artifacts, and dinosaur fossils). In the language of FLPMA, the BLM's responsibility is to administer public lands "on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield" of resources.

What this means, on a practical level, is that the BLM – except in areas specifically set aside for conservation purposes – must multitask to fulfill its duties. Nevertheless, consistent with the BLM's goal of good stewardship of public land resources, "multiple use" does not mean every use on every acre.

Below is a timeline of the BLM's history, which is primarily marked by the enactment of legislation that has guided the agency's mission, culminating in the passage of FLPMA, the BLM's legislative "charter," in 1976.

#### BLM Timeline

1776 – Declaration of Independence signed

1778 – Second Continental Congress, operating under the Articles of Confederation, begins persuading states to cede claimed land to create the public domain

1783 – Revolutionary War ends. Lands south of the Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi River are ceded by Britain to national government of Confederation

1785 – Land Ordinance adopted by Congress of the Confederation allows settlement of public domain lands and establishes Federal government's rectangular survey system

1787 – Drafting of U.S. Constitution begins

1788 – U.S. Constitution ratified, gives Congress the "power to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory or other property belonging to the United States..."

1803 – Louisiana Purchase by the United States from France nearly doubles size of the nation. Ohio becomes first state created from the public domain.

1804-1806 – Lewis and Clark expedition

1812 – General Land Office, responsible for all public land sales, patents, and entries, is established within Treasury Department to oversee disposition of ceded and acquired lands. (As successor agency to the GLO, the BLM maintains more than nine million historical land documents: survey plats and field notes, homestead patents, military warrants, and railroad grants. Many of these records can be found at: [www.glorerecords.blm.gov](http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov) (<http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov>).

1819 – Spanish cession of Florida and boundary adjustments west of the Mississippi River add more than 46 million acres to the public domain

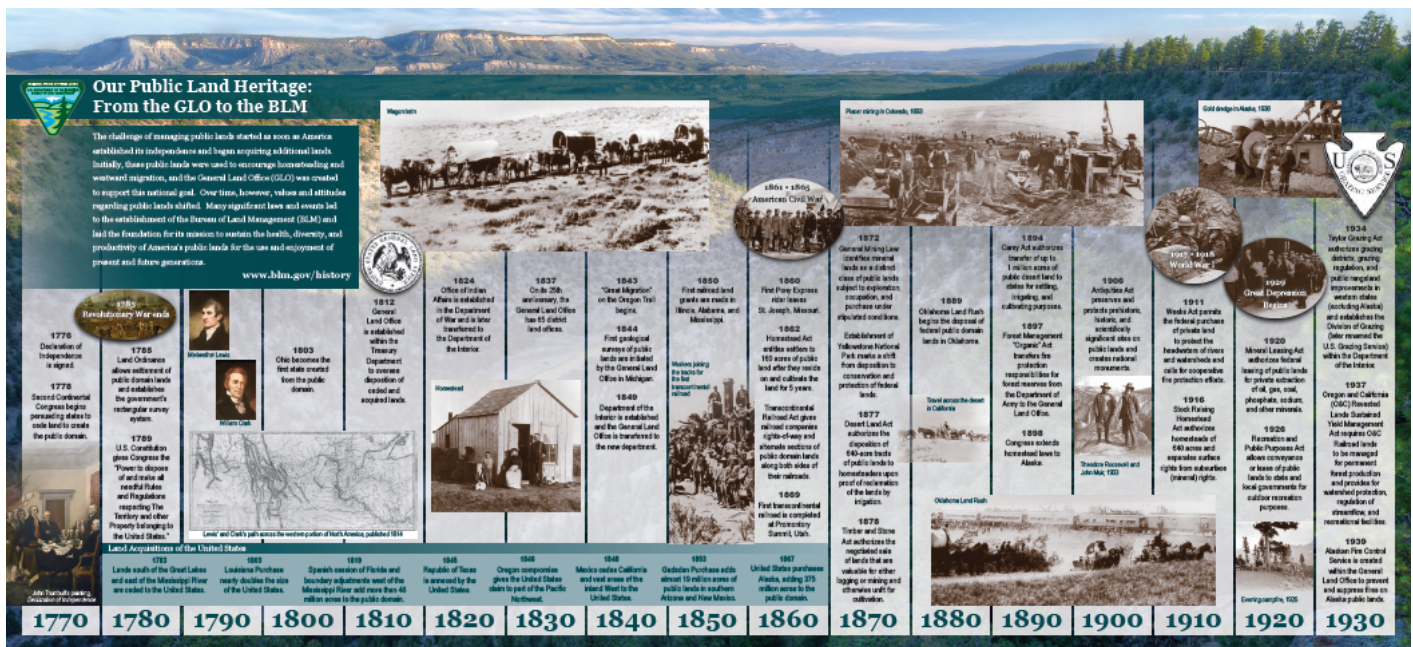
1845 – Republic of Texas, which had declared its independence from Mexico, is annexed by the United States

1846 – Oregon Treaty with Britain gives the United States claim to part of the Pacific Northwest

- 1848 -- Mexico cedes California and vast areas of the inland West to the United States
- 1853 -- Gadsden Purchase adds nearly 19 million acres of public land in southern Arizona and New Mexico
- 1861-1865 -- American Civil War
- 1862 -- Homestead Act entitles Western settlers to 160 acres of public land after they reside on and cultivate the land for five years. (On Jan. 1, 1863, Daniel Freeman and 417 others file the first homestead claims. By 1934, over 1.6 million homestead applications are processed, passing more than 270 million acres of public domain into private ownership.)
- 1862 -- Transcontinental Railroad Act gives railroad companies rights-of-way and alternate sections of public domain lands along both sides of their railroads
- 1867 -- United States purchases Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million, adding 375 million acres to the public domain
- 1869 -- First coast-to-coast railroad is completed at Promontory Summit, Utah
- 1872 -- General Mining Law identifies mineral lands as a distinct class of public lands subject to exploration, occupation, and purchase under specified conditions
- 1877 -- Desert Land Act authorizes the disposition of 640-acre tracts of public lands to homesteaders upon proof of reclamation of the lands by irrigation
- 1878 -- Timber and Stone Act authorizes negotiated sale of public lands that are valuable for either logging or mining and otherwise unfit for cultivation
- 1889 -- Oklahoma Land Rush begins the disposal of public domain lands in Oklahoma
- 1894 -- Carey Act authorizes transfer of up to one million acres of public desert land to states for settling, irrigating, and cultivating purposes
- 1897 -- Forest Management "Organic" Act transfers fire protection responsibilities for forest reserves from the Department of Army to the General Land Office
- 1898 -- Congress extends homestead laws to Alaska
- 1906 -- Antiquities Act preserves and protects prehistoric, historic, and scientifically significant sites on public lands through creation of national monuments
- 1916 -- Stock Raising Homestead Act authorizes homesteads of 640 acres and separates surface rights from subsurface (mineral) rights
- 1920 -- Mineral Leasing Act authorizes Federal leasing of public lands for private extraction of oil, gas, coal, phosphate, sodium, and other minerals
- 1926 -- Recreation and Public Purposes Act allows conveyance or lease of public lands to state and local governments for outdoor recreation purposes
- 1934 -- Taylor Grazing Act authorizes grazing districts, regulation of grazing, and public rangeland improvements in Western states (excluding Alaska) and establishes Division of Grazing (later renamed U.S. Grazing Service) within the Department of the Interior
- 1937 -- Oregon and California (O&C) Revested Lands Sustained Yield Management Act requires O&C Railroad lands to be managed for permanent forest production and provides for watershed protection, regulation of streamflow, and recreational facilities
- 1941-1945 -- World War II
- 1942 -- Extensive withdrawal of public lands for military purposes begins, with more than 13 million acres withdrawn in two years
- 1946 -- BLM is established within the Department of the Interior through the consolidation of General Land Office and U.S. Grazing Service
- 1953 -- Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act authorizes Secretary of the Interior to lease mineral lands more than three miles offshore. The BLM assumes responsibility for leasing through competitive sales.
- 1954 -- Recreation and Public Purposes Act amends the 1926 Act and allows sale and lease of public lands for purposes besides recreation
- 1955 -- Multiple Surface Use Act withdraws common varieties of minerals from entry as mining claims and allows claim owners to use the surface for mining operation purposes only.
- 1959 -- Wild Horse Protection Act (also known as the "Wild Horse Annie Act") prohibits hunting of wild horses and burros on public land by aircraft or motor vehicles
- 1964 -- Wilderness Act protects undeveloped Federal land to preserve its natural condition
- 1965 -- Land and Water Conservation Fund is established for Federal acquisition of outdoor recreation areas

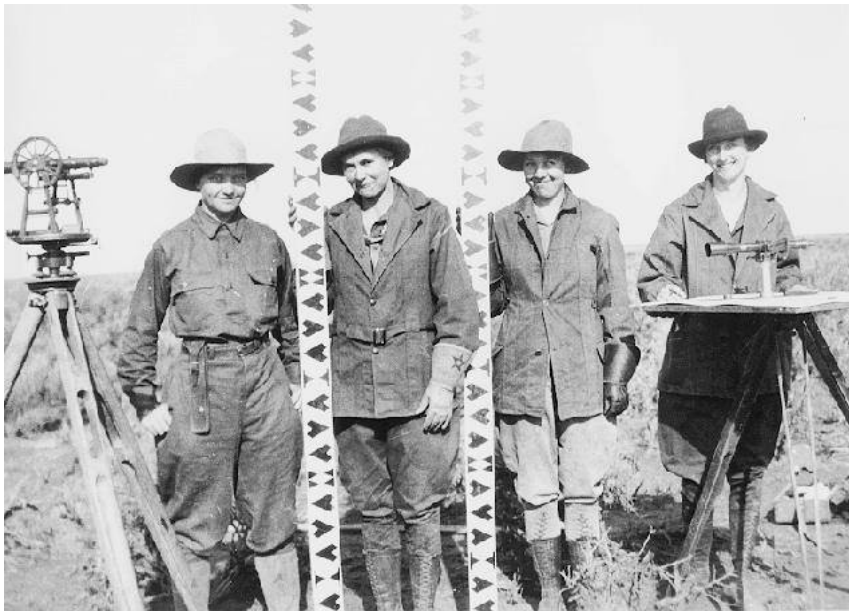
- 1966 – National Historic Preservation Act expands protection of prehistoric and historic properties
- 1968 – Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and National Trails System Act preserve sites with outstanding natural, cultural, scenic, historic, and recreational significance
- 1969 – National Environmental Policy Act requires Federal agencies to assess the impacts of their actions on the environment
- 1971 – Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act provides for settlement of aboriginal land claims of Alaskan Natives and Native groups. The BLM is tasked with the largest U.S. land transfer effort ever undertaken.
- 1971 – Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act mandates protection and management of these animals on public lands managed by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service
- 1973 – Endangered Species Act requires the conservation of threatened and endangered plants and animals and the ecosystems on which they depend
- 1975 – Energy Policy and Conservation Act addresses energy demands and establishes a strategic petroleum reserve
- 1976 – Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA, the BLM's legislative "charter") repeals homestead laws and establishes policy of retaining public lands in Federal ownership. FLPMA requires that these lands be managed for multiple uses and sustained yield through land-use planning.
- 1976 – Management of the National Petroleum Reserve–Alaska is transferred from the U.S. Navy to the BLM
- 1977 – Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act ensures environmental safeguards for mining and reclamation of mined areas
- 1978 – Public Rangelands Improvement Act requires inventory, determination of trends, and improvement of public rangelands
- 1979 – Archaeological Resources Protection Act requires permits for excavation or removal of these resources from Federal lands and sets criminal and civil penalties for violations
- 1980 – Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act designates millions of acres of public land in Alaska as wilderness, national parks, national wildlife refuges, and wild and scenic rivers. Act also provides for subsistence use by rural Alaska residents.
- 1980 – The BLM completes its first resource management (land-use) plan, covering the California Desert Conservation Area, and designates its first areas of critical environmental concern in Utah and California
- 1983 – The BLM transfers responsibility for offshore leasing to the Minerals Management Service
- 1987 – Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act establishes a new leasing system and changes certain operational procedures for onshore resources on Federal lands.
- 1990 – Northern spotted owl is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, leading to enjoinder of all Federal timber sales within its range
- 1996 – Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah is designated by President, representing first such monument under BLM management
- 2000 – National Landscape Conservation System, consisting of wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, national monuments, and other conservation-related units on BLM-managed land, is established by Secretary of the Interior
- 2005 – Energy Policy Act promotes energy efficiency and the production of secure, affordable, and reliable domestic energy
- 2008 – BLM-managed lands are officially designated as the National System of Public Lands
- 2009 – Omnibus Public Land Management Act officially authorizes National Landscape Conservation System and sets penalties for unauthorized removal of paleontological resources from Federal lands

## HISTORY DOWNLOAD



[Download a copy of our BLM history timeline. \(/sites/blm.gov/files/About\\_historytimeline.pdf\)](http://www.blm.gov/files/About_historytimeline.pdf)

## FEATURED PHOTOS



View current and historic land management photos in [@mypubliclands FLPMA Flickr album](https://www.flickr.com/photos/mypubliclands/albums/72157671460858983) (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mypubliclands/albums/72157671460858983>).

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