

TESTIMONY OF EDWARD W. SHEPARD, PRESIDENT, PUBLIC LANDS FOUNDATION  
THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED  
AGENCIES; COMMITTEE OF APPROPRIATIONS;  
ATTENTION: OUSTSIDE WITNESS TESTIMONY  
FISCAL YEAR 2014 BUDGET – BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

April 16, 2013

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 2014. 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 scientific management of lands administered by the BLM.

The PLF, like others, is somewhat handicapped in providing testimony on the FY 2014 budget. The budget was only made public last week and we have not been able to fully analyze the effects on the many BLM programs. Nevertheless, we feel it is important to highlight some of the important issues facing the BLM in managing the Nation's NSPL.

Overview

Some of the most significant management challenges for the BLM stem from rapid population and urban growth in the West and accompanying increased demand for access to, and use of the lands and resources of the NSPL. The BLM's stakeholders are as diverse as the natural resources the Bureau manages. Each of these stakeholders holds their special interest in the lands high and passionately defends it over other uses of the land.

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

BLM management activities contribute to the vitality of state and local economies, generating expected revenues in excess of \$4.5 billion in FY 2013, mostly from energy development. The multiplier effect from the use of these lands greatly expands the economic benefits to communities many times. According to the *Department of the Interior Economic Contributions* report of June 21, 2011, the public lands generated a combined economic effect in excess of \$120 billion and over 550,000 full and part-time jobs. However, these revenues are best achieved when there is some balance in the programs to provide for the diversity of uses and maintenance of healthy landscapes.

### Budget Overview

The PLF recognizes the difficult situation the Nation is in and fully appreciates the hard decisions that must be made, by Congress and the Administration, to reduce the budget deficit. To that end, the PLF is supportive of BLM budget requests that support the wise development of energy resources, both traditional and renewable, that provide opportunities to reduce dependence on foreign sources while generating revenues. At the same time, the wise development of these resources provides needed jobs in our rural communities. The energy program should be adequately funded to assure that it is properly carried out and there is necessary oversight to assure that all producers of energy are complying with laws and lease terms, and accurately reporting production. This will result in revenue generated for the U.S. Treasury.

The BLM is to be commended for its work to establish Solar Energy Zones. These will prioritize locating renewable energy opportunities in areas best suited for the development of renewable resources while allowing more efficient use of BLM and industry resources, workforces, and funds.

The development of energy resources, traditional and renewable, does not come without effects on other resources. Funding other high value resources can help mitigate and offset some of the effects on the landscape. The potential listing of sage-grouse as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act is of great concern. The BLM, as the stewards of the majority of this species habitat, has been working diligently with the Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Forest Service, state wildlife agencies, state and local governments, and resource users to develop and implement conservation plans for this bird that will hopefully lead to a not-warranted finding by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Species listing leads to lengthy and expensive processes. The money spent on process could be better spent on implementing conservation practices for the sage-grouse, preventing the listing of other species, and helping to recover species already listed.

Recreation is one of the fastest growing uses of our public lands and can have a significant economic impact. A large and growing part of our population in the West now lives within an hour's drive of BLM managed lands. However, this use, like others can also have significant negative effects on the landscape if inadequate funding affects proper management and enforcement.

The National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) is comprised of some of the most unique and valued landscapes in the Nation's vast holdings. These areas are incredibly diverse and have been designated for their outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values. They also provide working landscapes where it can be demonstrated that multiple use can be practiced on areas with outstanding conservation values. Management of the NLCS has long been underfunded.

The Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA) has sunset and is being considered for reauthorization. The PLF supports reauthorization as it has allowed the BLM to transfer into private ownership and use lands that the BLM has determined to be available for disposal through land use plans. Revenue generated from the sale of these lands has allowed the Bureau to acquire valuable lands and access to public lands from willing sellers, as well as funding administration of the Act.

Of all of the challenges and opportunities facing the BLM, probably none receives more passionate public input than the Wild Horse and Burro program. We are dismayed that, despite repeated efforts by the BLM, the issue seems unsolvable and the Bureau continues to be stymied in implementing solutions that are acceptable to the American public to provide for the welfare of the animals and the health of the range. The current situation is unsustainable, but this program must continue to be funded as there are approximately 50,000 animals in holding and another 37,000 on the range. At some point Congress must step in and pass legislation that provides more specific guidance on this program.

BLM's vast portfolio includes programs such as the Rangeland Resource Program and the Public Domain and O&C Forestry programs. These important programs provide management tools for the restoration and maintenance of healthy landscapes, while at the same time providing raw materials, employment opportunities, and quality of life for many throughout the rural West. These programs should receive adequate funding to allow them to maintain their mission as part of BLM's vast portfolio.

Land use planning is the foundation upon which all BLM management decisions are built. Out of date and inadequate plans lead to increased litigation, adding greatly to BLM's management costs and frustrating efforts to implement programs. Resource Management Plans are designed to last for 15 to 20 years. Without adequate funding, the BLM will be hampered in its efforts to

affect long term management changes and implement many of the programs that can provide employment, raw materials, and quality of life for the American citizens.

The PLF strongly supports the dedicated professional employees of the BLM and other agencies. Public employees have stepped up to the plate to contribute their share to the deficit issues facing the Country. For the last several years these committed public servants have done their best to implement the wishes of the Administration and Congress. However, when appropriations and budgets are not known until six months into the fiscal year, it leaves the employees to scramble to implement projects efficiently in the few months remaining. The process is broken and there are many reasons for this. We ask that this subcommittee do what it can within its powers to help fix the process.

Mr. Chairman, we do appreciate the hard choices that this Subcommittee has before it. We hope that our comments will be of help as you work through the FY 2014 budget process. Due to the late release of the President's Budget, we ask for the Subcommittees indulgence to allow PLF to follow up this statement with more specific information in the coming days and weeks as we more fully analyze BLM's budget request.

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Edward W. Shepard, President  
Public Lands Foundation  
P.O. Box 7226  
Arlington, VA 22207  
Tel: 971-832-3945  
Email: sssstr1@comcast.net