Our Public Land Heritage: From the GLO to the BLM

The challenge of managing public lands started as soon as America established its independence and began acquiring additional lands. Initially, these public lands were used to encourage homesteading and westward migration, and the General Land Office (GLO) was created to support this national goal. Over time, however, values and attitudes regarding public lands shifted. Many significant laws and events led to the establishment of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and laid the foundations for the mission to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America’s public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

www.blm.gov/history

Declaration of Independence

persuading states to cede land to create the public domain.

Revolutionary War ends

Land Ordinance allocates settlement of public domain lands and establishes the government’s rectangular survey system.

U.S. Constitution gives Congress the “Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting The Territory and other Property belonging to the United States.”

Land Acquisitions of the United States

Lands south of Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi River were settled by the United States.

Lands between the Mississippi River and the Appalachian Mountains are ceded to the United States in the Treaty of 1783.

Republic of Texas is annexed by the United States.

California is admitted to the United States.

Spanish cession of Florida and territory north of the 30th Parallel (Texas) to the United States.

Oregon Treaty gives the United States coastal areas of the Pacific Northwest.

Cubberland Purchase adds almost 18 million acres of public lands in southern Arizona and New Mexico.

United States purchases Alaska, adding 375 million acres to the public domain.

Gadsden Purchase adds more than 46 million acres of public lands in southern Arizona and New Mexico.

Oregon and California (B.C.) Reserved Lands Established Law requires O&C River districts to be managed for flood control, water development, and recreation.

Alaska Fire Control Service is created within the General Land Office to prevent and fight fires on Alaska public lands.

Taylor Grazing Act authorizes grazing on public lands, grazing regulation, and public targeted grazing.

Mineral Leasing Act authorizes federal disposal of public lands for private extraction of oil, gas, coal, phosphate, and other minerals.

Recreational and Public Purposes Act authorizes lease or conveyance of public lands to state and local governments for outdoor recreation purposes.

Federal Land Policy and Management Act requires BLM to manage and protect federal public land resources to promote the conservation, development, and multiple use of the lands.

Public Land Service is established.

General Mining Law identifies mineral (later renamed the General Mining Law) rights to mining, milling, and placer mining.

Homestead Act authorizes settlers to claim to part of the Pacific Northwest.

Antiquities Act creates national monuments.

Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot start the BLM.

God design in Alaska, 1978

Evening campfire, 1926

Placer mining in Colorado, 1865

American Civil War ends

Reservations for the tribes.

Wild West

Revolutionary War ends

Second Continental Congress begins persuading states to cede land to create the public domain.

U.S. Constitution gives Congress the “Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting The Territory and other Property belonging to the United States.”

Land Ordinance allocates settlement of public domain lands and establishes the government’s rectangular survey system.

U.S. Constitution gives Congress the “Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting The Territory and other Property belonging to the United States.”

Land Acquisitions of the United States

Lands south of Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi River were settled by the United States.

Lands between the Mississippi River and the Appalachian Mountains are ceded to the United States in the Treaty of 1783.

Republic of Texas is annexed by the United States.

California is admitted to the United States.

Spanish cession of Florida and territory north of the 30th Parallel (Texas) to the United States.

Oregon Treaty gives the United States coastal areas of the Pacific Northwest.

Cubberland Purchase adds almost 18 million acres of public lands in southern Arizona and New Mexico.

United States purchases Alaska, adding 375 million acres to the public domain.

Gadsden Purchase adds more than 46 million acres of public lands in southern Arizona and New Mexico.

Oregon and California (B.C.) Reserved Lands Established Law requires O&C River districts to be managed for flood control, water development, and recreation.

Alaska Fire Control Service is created within the General Land Office to prevent and fight fires on Alaska public lands.

Taylor Grazing Act authorizes grazing on public lands, grazing regulation, and public targeted grazing.

Mineral Leasing Act authorizes federal disposal of public lands for private extraction of oil, gas, coal, phosphate, and other minerals.

Recreational and Public Purposes Act authorizes lease or conveyance of public lands to state and local governments for outdoor recreation purposes.

Federal Land Policy and Management Act requires BLM to manage and protect federal public land resources to promote the conservation, development, and multiple use of the lands.

Public Land Service is established.

General Mining Law identifies mineral (later renamed the General Mining Law) rights to mining, milling, and placer mining.

Homestead Act authorizes settlers to claim to part of the Pacific Northwest.

Antiquities Act creates national monuments.

Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot start the BLM.

God design in Alaska, 1978

Evening campfire, 1926

Placer mining in Colorado, 1865

American Civil War ends

Reservations for the tribes.
Note: The following timeline provides key events in the history of land conservation and management in the United States, focusing on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

1953 - Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to lease mineral lands more than 3 miles offshore; the BLM assumes responsibility for leasing through competitive sales.

1954 - Recreation and Public Use Act amends the 1932 act and allows the sale and lease of public lands for other purposes in addition to recreation.

1958 - The BLM reorganizes and creates a sales office system.

1962 - Multiple Surface Use Act withdraws commercial varieties of minerals from entry as mining claims and authorizes the 26-million-acre National System of Public Lands.

1964 - Public Land Administration Act allows the use of surpluses and cooperative agreements to improve and better manage public lands.

1966 - Public Law 89-737 begins the Department of the Interior's acquisition of outdoor recreation areas.


1969 - Heber C. Harmon Natural Resources Conservation Act requires that public lands be managed for multiple uses and sustained yield through land use planning. The National Historic Preservation Act is amended to provide for the protection of prehistoric and historic properties.

1970 - National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to prepare environmental impact statements for major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.

1972 - Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the Department of the Interior to regulate and manage free-ranging horses and burros on public lands.

1974 - National Historic Preservation Act expands protection of historic and archaeological properties.

1980 - Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act provides for settlement of aboriginal land claims of Alaska Natives and Native groups. The BLM is involved in the largest U.S. land transfer effort ever undertaken.

1985 - Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act designates and manages public lands in Alaska as national parks, wildlife refuges, and scenic areas.


1996 - Wild and Scenic Rivers and National Trails Protection Act amends the 1978 act to designate areas of critical concern in the United States.

1997 - Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act provides for the protection and management of Federal land affected by strip mining.

2000 - National Environmental Policy Act ensures the production of secure, affordable, and competitive energy sources.

2003 - Energy Security Act promotes the development of alternative energy sources, energy efficiency, and reducing the country's reliance on foreign fuel sources.

2006 - Omnibus Public Land Management Act authorizes the 26-million-acre National Landscape Conservation System and establishes permit requirements and penalties for unauthorized removal of palaeontological resources from federal lands.

2008 - BLM-managed lands are officially designated as the National System of Public Lands.

2010 - The BLM benefits the national economy as well as the economies of local communities. Activities on BLM lands, such as energy production, mineral extraction, timber harvesting, grazing, and recreation, result in jobs and income from goods and services associated with public land use.

Today, the BLM plays a crucial role in the conservation and management of public lands, ensuring that they are managed for multiple uses and sustained yield through land use planning, and protecting the nation's historic, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources.