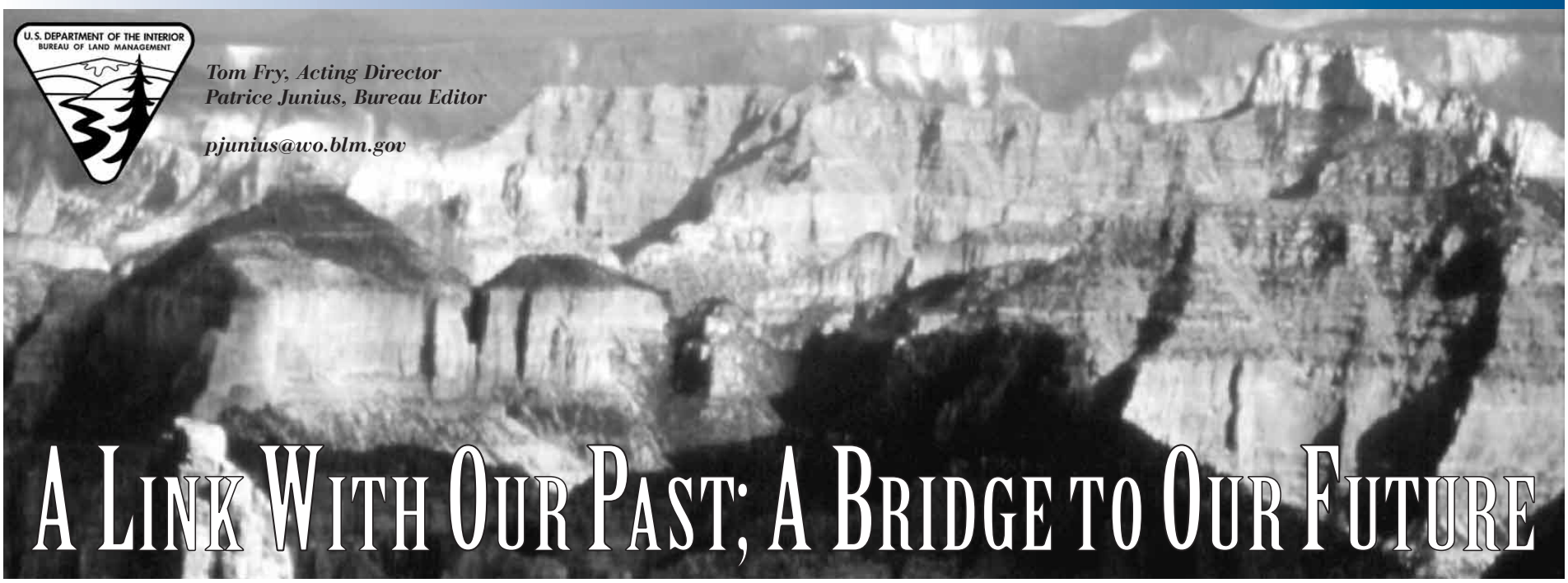
Bureau of Land Management



Tom Fry, Acting Director
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A Link With Our Past; A Bridge to Our Future

With landscapes ranging from desert mountains and eroded canyons to great expanses of sagebrush and tundra flats, Bureau of Land Management sites cover a vast area of the American West, offering stately beauty, majestic vistas, healthful recreational activities, and a vast array of natural resources that provide livelihoods for thousands of communities.

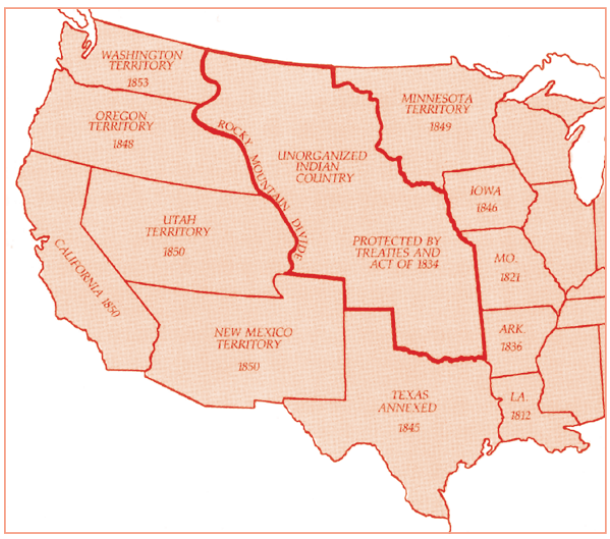
The bureau has a broader range of resource management jobs than any other Interior unit. BLM annually authorizes 20,000 western ranchers to use public rangelands, sells as much as 170 million board feet of sawtimber and other forest products, and issues thousands of leases for oil, gas, and geothermal exploration and development. Public lands are made available for coal production, gold and silver mining, sand and gravel operations, electrical transmission lines, hunting and fishing guide services, and movie filming.

BLM employees oversee these commercial uses to ensure that they are conducted in accordance with federal laws and that the lands are restored after mining, construction, and filming are completed. The activities generated $1.3 billion in revenue in fiscal year 1998, which was shared with state, local, and tribal governments. More than $740 million was transferred to the states in fiscal year 1998.

BLM also manages more than 1,000 recreational sites but the agency's major emphasis is on providing "wide-open spaces"—areas, rivers, and trails for biking, hiking, camping, fishing, and similar activities. BLM-managed units will support nearly 65 million recreational visits by the year 2000. The abundant wildlife that live on public lands adds to the outdoor recreational experience. About 1.5 million deer, 250,000 elk, 25,000 bighorn sheep, and many other species inhabit the public domain under BLM's care. The 40,000 wild horses and burros that roam BLM lands provide a unique reminder of the history of the American West.

The bureau's job description also includes: the preservation of significant cultural and natural features on public lands, which required an inventory of more than 10 million acres for cultural resources and recorded 180,000 properties; managing 1.6 million acres of designated wilderness lands and special management for another 25 million acres; and protecting public health, safety, and property from illegal dumping of hazardous material, theft of federal property, and misuse of resources. Moreover, in a typical year, BLMers help to suppress wildfires that threaten private property and public resources and carry out prescribed burns that help to prevent large scale uncontrollable wildfires.

***Molly S. McUsic**, counselor to the Secretary, has played a key role in a number of Departmental land initiatives in the West, including the historic Utah land exchange agreement and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. She joined Interior in July 1997 and served as the lead federal negotiator on the Utah state/federal land exchange that resolved the difficult issue of state school trust lands located in national preserves. The agreement was signed into law by the President on Oct. 31, 1998. McUsic also was responsible for managing the development of the land use plan for the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. She is the Department lead on property rights/takings in Congress and the Executive Branch. McUsic is a graduate of the University of North Carolina School of Law and received her J.D., magna cum laude, from Harvard Law School, where she also was editor of the Harvard Law Review.*



About 9,000 BLM employees handle these widely varying responsibilities, managing more than 264 million acres—about one-eighth of America's land surface, or 41 percent of the lands under federal ownership. They also are responsible for overseeing 560 million acres of subsurface mineral, oil, and gas deposits. Most BLM-administered lands are in eleven western states and Alaska, though small parcels are scattered throughout the eastern United States.

Though these numbers are staggering, the biggest challenge facing BLM employees is developing a reasonable balance among these multiple uses of public lands. How the bureau, which began as the General Land Office, came to its complex role and responsibilities is as much a story of America's changing values as it is of managing the nation's natural resources.

The Public Domain, 1812-1946

Federal agencies became the legal guardians of the public domain as these lands were acquired by the U.S. Government through treaties with American Indians, foreign powers, and neighboring nations. National policy generally provided for the disposal of the lands to pay off the public debt and provide a revenue stream for the Federal Government.

In 1812, Congress established the General Land Office under the Treasury Department to administer and dispose of the public domain. The Land Office played a major role in trans-Appalachian settlement under the Public Lands Act of 1820, which allowed tracts as small as 80 acres to be sold for $1.25 an acre. Public land sales boomed and the term "doing a land-office business" soon came into the American lexicon, signifying the swift and lucrative transactions that took place.

The vast new public domain acquired through the acquisition of Oregon in 1846 and the Mexican-American War of 1848 spurred the Thirtieth Congress to pass a bill transferring the General Land Office from a beleaguered Treasury Department to the new Department of the Interior. President **James K. Polk** signed the bill a few minutes before midnight on March 3, 1849—his last day in office.

Under Interior, the General Land Office loomed especially large in the westward movement following the enactment of three historic laws in 1862. Under the Pacific Railroad Act, land grants made possible the speedy construction of the Union Pacific, Central Pacific, Northern Pacific, Santa Fe, and Southern Pacific railroads. Under the Morrill Act, land grants financed the establishment of state universities and agricultural colleges. And under the famed Homestead Act, settlers obtained free 160-acre homesteads.

Of the 1.8 billion acres disposed of by the General Land Office during the 19th and early 20th centuries, two-thirds went to citizens, corporations, and the states. Railroads received more than 94 million acres while homesteaders ultimately claimed almost 290 million acres. That built the country's economic foundation, opened the West to settlement, and united the vast expanses of territory into one nation. Many of the remaining lands were set aside for national forests, wildlife refuges, parks, and monuments. At its peak in the 1880s, the General Land Office rarely had more than 1,000 employees, nearly half of whom were clerks toiling in Washington over huge ledger books in which land transactions were recorded.

Nothing more dramatically stimulated the westward movement than discoveries of gold, silver, and other valuable minerals on the public lands. The thousands who rushed to California in 1849 were followed by other waves to Oregon, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, and Colorado in the 1850s and 1860s as mineral strikes were publicized there. Though the Mining Law of 1872 allowed prospectors to protect their interests by marking their claims and filing notice, they were not required to prove mineral production within a reasonable time. Hence, thousands of acres of public land became encumbered with claims of no public or private benefit. The Minerals Leasing Act of 1920 partially remedied this problem by requiring private producers to pay the Federal Government minimal rent and royalties on oil, coal, or other mineral production from public lands that they leased from the General Land Office.

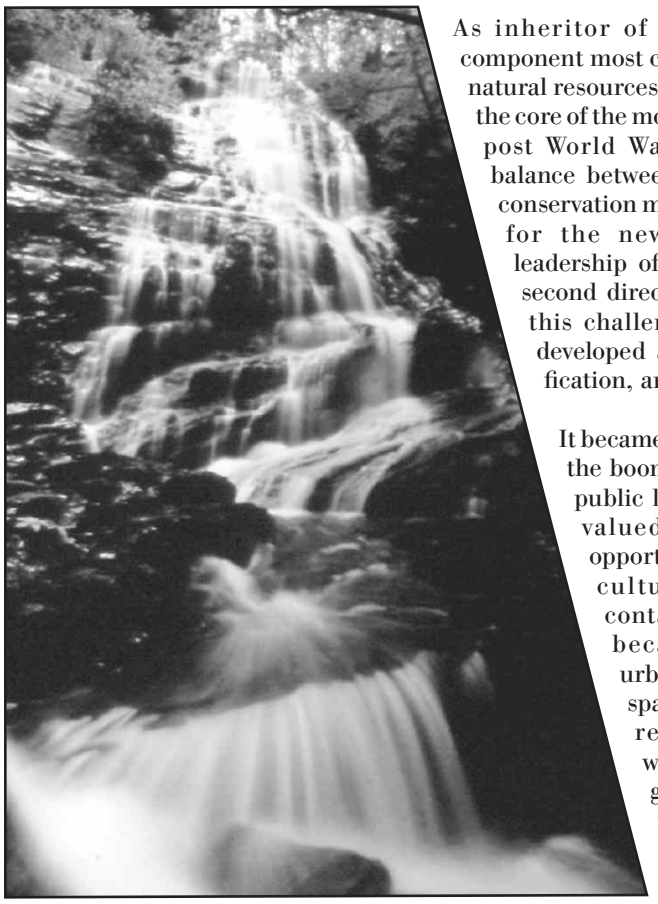
The Escalante River near Escalante, Utah, exhibited considerable change between 1949, top, and 1992, at left. Innovative management techniques, including shifting livestock grazing to late fall-early winter in the 1960s, resulted in dramatic improvements in channel and riparian vegetation conditions.

Livestock grazing was the last major unregulated economic use of the public lands. As 20th-Century homesteaders pushed stockmen into the semi-arid Rocky Mountain Plateau, competition for the waning grasslands intensified. Overgrazing turned range to desert. By 1934—at the height of the Dust Bowl years of the Great Depression—the need for what conservationists had unsuccessfully urged three decades earlier was widely apparent and Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act. The law authorized the Secretary of the Interior to place 80 million acres of the public domain in grazing districts and set rules and fees for grazing permits. Twenty-five percent of the fee receipts could go for range improvements. The Taylor Act essentially ended the homesteading era in the lower 48 states.

Interior's new Grazing Division, which became the Grazing Service in 1939, provided active range management, controlling the use of the public lands for grazing and introducing policies and management approaches to improve the condition of these rangelands. Under **Farrington R. Carpenter**, its first chief, the Grazing Division relied heavily on local citizen participation in organizing the districts and approving permit applications.

The Public Domain, 1947-1999

On July 16, 1946, President **Harry Truman** signed Reorganization Plan #3 merging the General Land Office, one of the oldest federal bureaus, with the Grazing Service, one of the newest, to create the Bureau of Land Management. "That date," notes BLM historian **E. Louise Peffer**, "opened a new chapter in the history of public land administration in the United States."



As inheritor of the original Interior component most concerned with lands and natural resources, BLM may be considered the core of the modern Department. In the post World War II period, finding a balance between its land disposal and conservation mandates proved daunting for the new agency. Under the leadership of **Marion Clawson**, the second director, BLM began to meet this challenge and over the years developed a land inventory, classification, and planning system.

It became increasingly apparent in the boom years of the 1950s that public lands were being equally valued for the recreational opportunities they offered, the cultural resources they contained, and as America became an increasingly urban world, their vast open spaces and environmental resources. The people who used these lands gradually came to a fuller realization of the often subtle connections between the parts of the landscape—the soil, the birds, the water, the animals, and the forests—all the pieces of the puzzle.

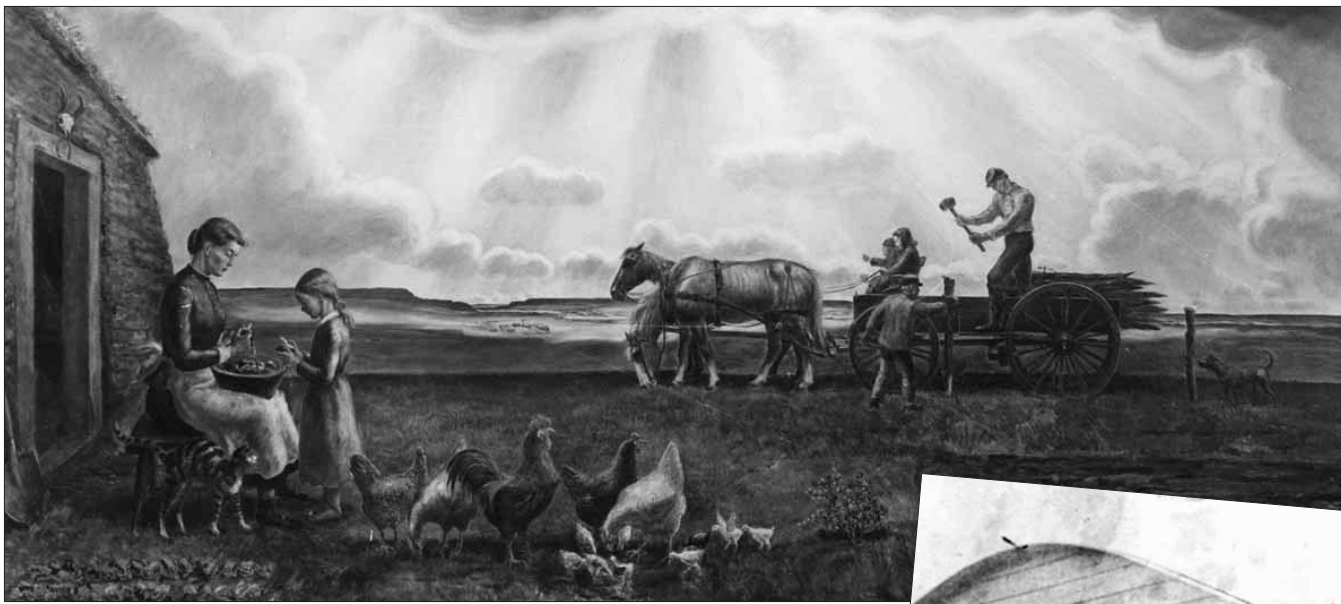
Those connections are strands in the web of life on which we also depend for food, clean air and water, livelihoods, peace of mind, and quality of life. This new understanding of our environment and the reality of the American landscape reveal that we must work together to safeguard the beauty and health of our heritage.

Under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the BLM received a clarified and comprehensive mission statement emphasizing multiple use, sustained yield, and environmental protection. The bureau's mandate is to manage the public domain to accommodate many uses, while sustaining the long-term health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The multiple use philosophy created a system in which the same area of land could be used simultaneously for several purposes, often by different groups and individuals.

To promote both biological diversity on the public lands and sustainable development of their resources, BLM uses a landscape or watershed approach. Most Americans with a strong sense of place and regional consciousness can identify with the natural surroundings and characteristics of one's home, whether that's the Rocky Mountains, Palm Springs, California, or Billings, Montana. Its premise is simple: partnerships among all the people who live in and make decisions about the community's natural landscape.

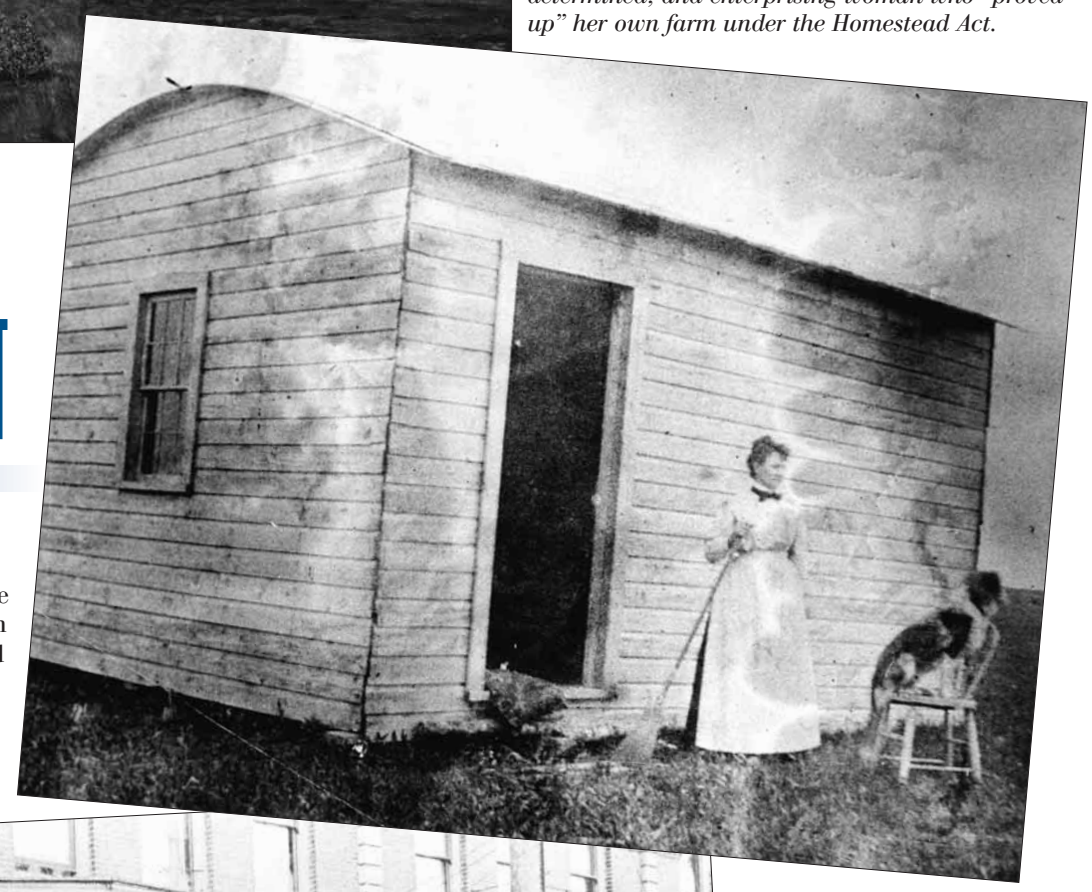
The need for common ground in this vital decision-making process led BLM to initiate Resource Advisory Councils. More than two dozen of these state councils were formed in 1995 to move the locus of decision-making on public land issues to the local level. The aim is to eliminate "one-size-fits-all" management of public lands. Each group has 15 members, all local residents representing a diversity of public land interests and users. The councils advise BLM and make recommendations on public land management issues.

Public lands under BLM's care are a link with our past and a bridge to our future. Sustaining that link is a national obligation that we all owe to future generations.



WOMEN & HOMESTEADING

At left, this popular Interior mural of a woman with child and husband in the field conveys the traditional image of the woman on the American frontier, as nurturer and supporter of the male-led homestead enterprise. But the faded photograph below captures the reality of the strong, determined, and enterprising woman who "proved up" her own farm under the Homestead Act.



A PLACE TO CALL THEIR OWN

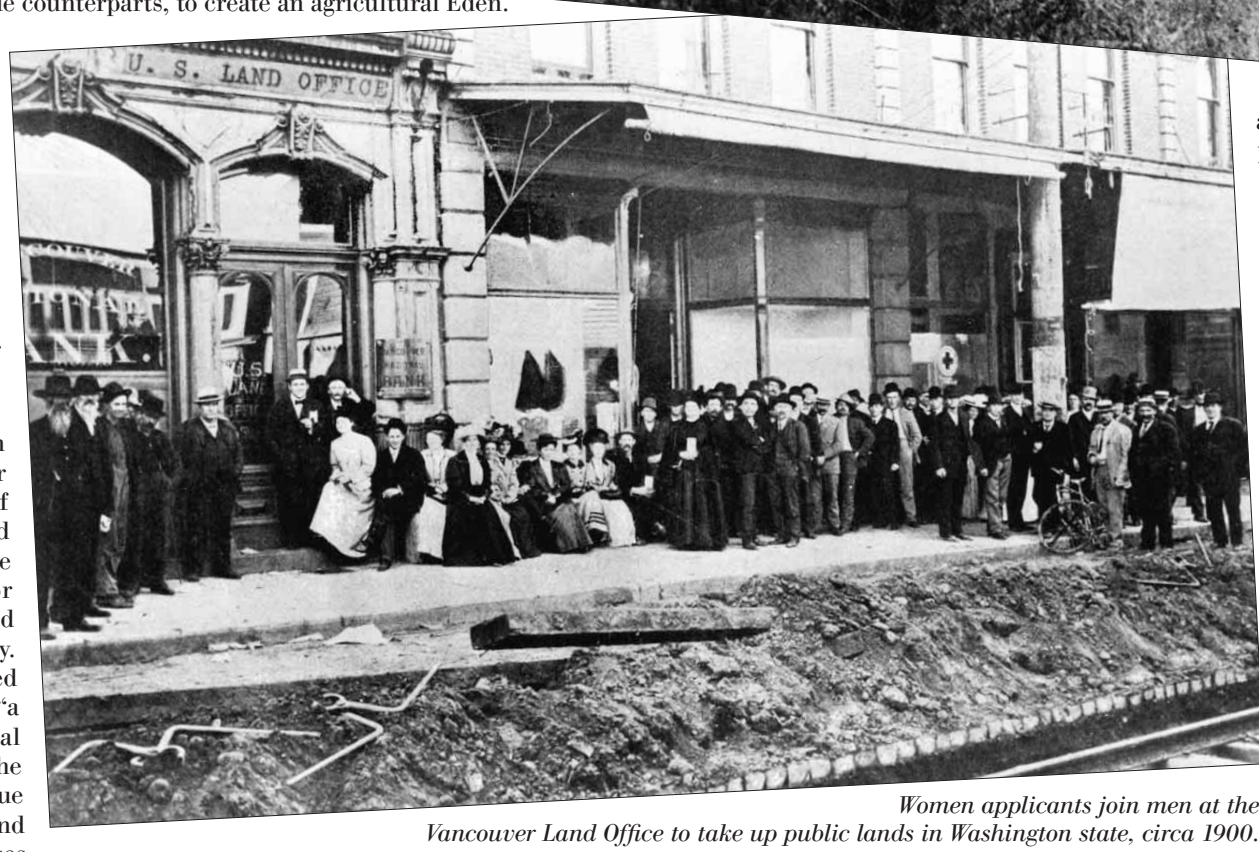
James Muhn, Land Law Historian

Our popular image of frontier settlers has been of men battling nature to carve out a farm of their own in the West. If women ever enter this picture, it is in their domestic role as mothers and housekeepers. Their role seemed supportive, if not supplemental, to that of their rugged, pioneering husbands.

Women, however, played a much more active role in the settlement and development of the frontier. Thousands of them took up lands of their own, seeking, along with their male counterparts, to create an agricultural Eden.

Women could not have actively participated in the settlement of the West unless the public land laws permitted. In the early history of the public domain, there was limited opportunity for women to directly acquire land. But passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 widened the door of opportunity.

Under the act, "any person who is the head of a family, or who has arrived at the age of twenty-one years" could receive parcels of land. The Department of the Interior held that those words allowed unmarried women to qualify. Married women were excluded because the courts held that "a married woman has no legal existence, her services and the proceeds of her labor being due and belonging to her husband . . . The same objection arises should she claim as the 'head of the family,' as the husband is the 'head' during the existence of the marital tie."



Women applicants join men at the Vancouver Land Office to take up public lands in Washington state, circa 1900.

Women took up homesteads for many reasons. Economic opportunity was an important motive. Many saw homesteading as a way of getting land in their own name. **Elinore Pruitt Stewart**, an early 20th Century women's homesteading advocate, saw it as "the solution of all [of] poverty's problems." A few women saw their homesteads as a form of pension. Others were not interested in the future, and only looked forward to "proving up" and selling the land for a quick profit. (The Homestead Act required applicants to reside on the property and improve it to gain title.)

There were other reasons women took up homesteads. Many thought the experience was a great adventure. As one Colorado woman remarked, "Every American with a spark of romance in his make-up has at some time of his life cherished [the] idea of taking up a claim." After the turn of the century, many women were attracted to homesteading by the ideals of independence and equality that the endeavor represented.

The exact number of women who became homesteaders is not known because the records of the old General Land Office do not break down applicants by gender. Research by historians, however, indicates that thousands of women availed themselves of the opportunities offered by the Homestead Act.

The research also suggests that prior to the turn of the century, women made about five percent of the homestead entries. In the early 1900s, the average climbed to nearly 20 percent. This increase was a consequence of changing attitudes toward women's roles, as well as the women's suffrage and equality movements. Rising agricultural prices may have also influenced the change.

Protecting Open Space in a Rapidly Growing West

Tom Fry, the acting director of the Bureau of Land Management, is committed to the agency's multiple-use land-management mission and looks to employee nitiative and stakeholder partnerships to bolster the bureau's efforts.

"In accommodating commercial and non-commercial uses of the public lands, the BLM will make certain that every activity we administer does not cause irreparable harm to healthy landscapes," said Fry, who was named acting director on Nov. 13. "In cases where harm has already occurred, we will act to restore the land. This will ensure that the public lands continue to provide us with clean water, clean air, and a wide range of other benefits, including outdoor recreational opportunities."

"BLM employees are fundamental to our success, and they deserve the best available resources. I will do everything I can to get them what they need to do their jobs effectively, creatively, and efficiently," Fry vowed.

Partnerships are critical to achieving BLM's goals, Fry said. "The BLM needs the expertise and involvement of all stakeholders—state and local officials, companies, and private organizations—to carry out our mission. With the help of our partners, we will achieve healthy landscapes and watersheds across the West."

Fry succeeded **Patrick A. Shea** as head of the BLM when Shea became acting deputy assistant secretary for Land and Minerals Management, moving up the ladder after Secretary Babbitt appointed **Sylvia Baca** to be acting assistant secretary for Land and Minerals Management. Baca succeeded **Bob Armstrong**, who retired as assistant secretary on Oct. 30.

Fry, who had been deputy director for the BLM since January 1997, joined the Interior Department as director of the Minerals Management Service. He subsequently served as chief of staff for Interior Deputy Secretary **John Garamendi**. Prior to coming to the Department in July 1993, Fry was vice-president of a Dallas natural gas processing and transmission company.

His government experience includes service as regional counsel for the U.S. Department of Energy in Dallas and as director of the Houston Field Office of the Economic Regulatory Administration. He also served for more than two years as assistant attorney general of the State of Texas, where he was assistant chief of the state's Anti-Trust Consumer Protection Program.

Tom Fry
Acting Director
Bureau of Land Management

Women homesteaders spanned the spectrums of age and experience. **Elaine Lindgren** in *Land of Her Own* tells us they were "young single women, older single women, widows, divorced or deserted women, and even a few married women who were considered heads of households." Most were single women in their 20s, but a few were in their 60s.

While literature at the turn of the century would have readers believe women homesteaders lived a lone and stoic existence, the majority of women homesteaders settled close to relatives or friends. Even those women who settled on their own had the company of neighbors and the social interactions that came with group picnics, community dances, and church activities.

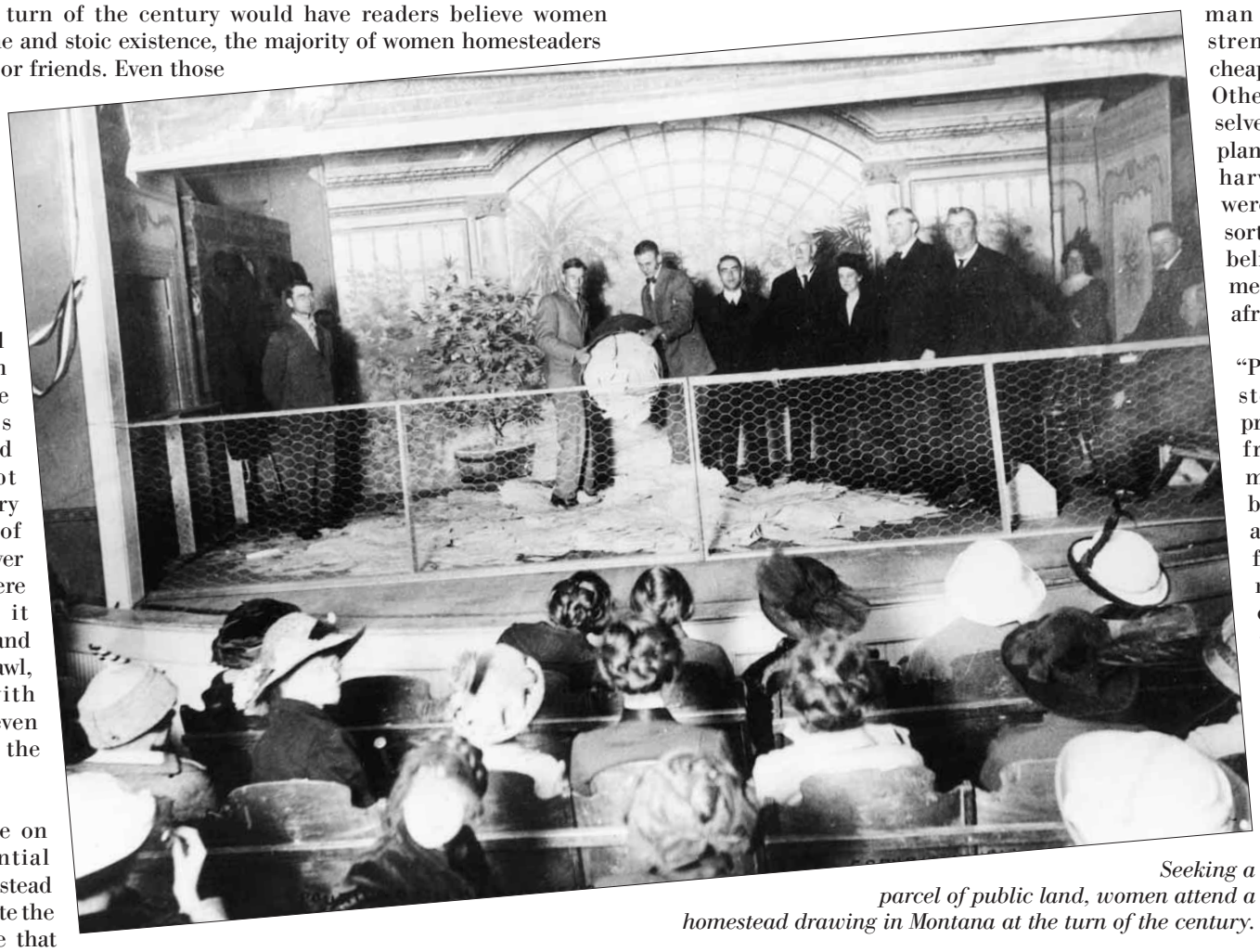
Homesteading could still be lonely and was often boring. One woman wrote of the "long intervals when one can't find anything to do except contemplate the scenery and watch the hands of the clock go round. I never knew how much time there is in the world, how it refuses to be prodded and hurried in its snaily crawl, until I contracted with Uncle Sam to spend seven consecutive months in the sagebrush."

Establishing a residence on the land was an essential requirement of the Homestead Act. The law did not dictate the type or size of structure that settlers had to build and women homesteaders lived in a variety of dwellings. The most primitive were the dugouts carved into hillsides. Others built sod houses or log cabins.

Most homestead "shacks," however, were of frame construction. These houses could be built cheaply and easily: an 8 x 10-foot shack cost as little as $12.50. A few women bought prefabricated houses that they could erect themselves, while others bought "mobile" residences that were moved onto their claims by wagon or on skids.

Most homestead residences were smaller than 160 square feet. One woman homesteader thought her house so small that she referred to it as the "dog house," because her dog seemed to take up what little space there was. Another lovingly called hers the "Piano Box."

The other critical requirement of the Homestead Act was the cultivation of the claim. This required hard physical labor and many women had this work done for them. As a Montana woman pointed out, she "had every qualification for farming that a man has except the brute strength, and that was the cheapest commodity to hire." Others did the work themselves. They broke the sod, planted the seeds, and did the harvesting. These women were "capable of doing all sorts of heavy work and jobs believed [only] suitable for men . . . [and were] never afraid of hard work."



Seeking a parcel of public land, women attend a homestead drawing in Montana at the turn of the century.

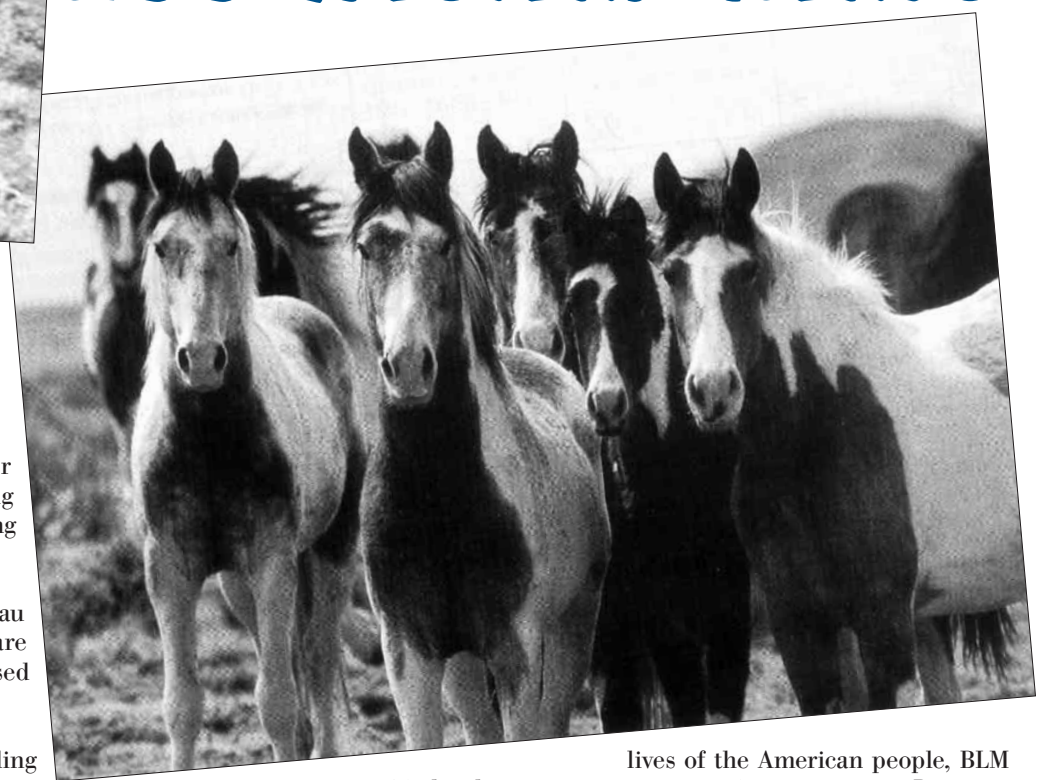
"Proving up" on a homestead was not a cheap proposition. The land was free in most cases but money was needed to build a homestead shack and to buy furnishings, food, seed, farm equipment, and the labor of others. Many women took up other work to raise the money needed to support them on their homestead claims. They taught school or worked as cooks, waitresses, aundresses, and secretaries.

Yet, for all their efforts, women found homesteading a hard proposition. Success could be elusive, and as with their male counterparts, about half the women who took up a homestead claim failed to prove up. Some found compliance with the terms of the Homestead Act too difficult. Others were simply beaten by the gamble that farming is.

That the failure rate was so high should not be surprising. Starting any enterprise is a risk, and homesteading was no less a venture. As one woman observed in 1916, "The farms Uncle Sam has to give away need very careful management in order to make them into paying propositions. They are merely opportunities, not certainties." But it was an opportunity that thousands of women came to realize.

WILD HORSES

The Challenges of Managing 200 Western Herds



The wild horse herds of the West are descended from animals released by or escaped from Spanish explorers, ranchers, miners, soldiers, and American Indians. Best known for their strength and endurance, wild horses also make champions in dressage, barrel racing, jumping, and pleasure riding.

Mary Knapp, Washington Office Public Affairs

They are living symbols of the pioneering spirit of America's West, renowned for their strength and endurance. But they are also vulnerable creatures, facing formidable natural and human hazards, and they need the help of animal-loving Americas, East and West.

More than 44,500 wild horses and burros roam public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the western United States. Because these animals are protected by federal law and have no natural predators, their numbers have increased dramatically since 1971, growing at a rate of about 18 to 20 percent a year.

BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program is using a combination of approaches, including fertility control vaccines and an improved adoption program, to meet the challenge of managing these animals in a manner that ensures a healthy, viable population of free-roaming herds within the limits of available public land resources.

Under the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971, which recognized that these living symbols contribute to the biological diversity of the nation and enrich the lives of the American people, BLM operates 201 herd-management areas in 10 western states. But most of the wild horses are found in Nevada and Wyoming, and wild burros are found primarily in the Mojave Desert in Arizona, California, and southern Nevada.

BLM monitors the health of public rangeland and wild horse herds to help determine the number of animals, including livestock and wildlife, the public land can sustain. Decisions about how many animals remain in herd-management areas are made as part of BLM's land-use planning process, which encourages and includes public participation.

To control the rate of growth in wild horse populations in Nevada, BLM has begun limited use of a one-year fertility control vaccine while continuing research efforts on a multi-year controlled-release vaccine. BLM's goal is to develop a contraceptive vaccine for horses that will have a one-to-three-year period of effectiveness.

BLM also removes a certain number of animals each year and offers them for adoption to qualified people who agree to provide humane care through the Adopt-A-Horse or Burro Program. Since 1973, BLM has placed more than 165,000 wild horses and burros in private care. Between 6,000 and 8,000 horses and 500 to 1,000 burros are adopted each year at locations across the country. (The number of burros BLM offers for adoption is much lower because the population and habitat of burros is smaller.)

Recently, BLM established new regulations that allow competitive bidding for wild horses and burros. The primary purposes of the rule change were to allow the public more control in selecting the animals they adopt and determining the value of a wild horse or burro. The adoption fees collected help to defray the costs of medical treatment, transportation, and adoptions.

After one year of providing humane care, an adopter may apply for title to the animal. With patience and dedication to training, wild horses have become champions in dressage, barrel racing, jumping, endurance racing, and pleasure riding. Wild burros, easily gentled regardless of age, particularly shine as guard animals.

Have **you** ever thought of adopting a wild horse or burro? To find out more about the animals and the adoption process, visit our homepage at **http://www.blm.gov/whb**

RECENT WILD HORSE INITIATIVES

During the past year and a half, BLM has improved its management of the wild horse and burro program to prevent unscrupulous people from abusing the adoption privilege and to ensure the humane treatment of adopted animals.

In May 1998, BLM rescinded the use of power of attorney to adopt animals, which will prevent would-be adopters who are only interested in the resale value of the animals from obtaining large numbers of wild horses and burros for commercial sale. The adoption application now also includes language that states an adopter has no intent to sell the wild horse or burro for slaughter, bucking stock, or for processing into commercial products.

To increase the number of successful adoptions, BLM is now contacting all adopters either by phone or in person within six months of an adoption to evaluate the treatment of the animal. BLM has increased on-site compliance inspections of untitled adopted animals and improved its electronic records system so that it can now track whether an adopter cared for the wild horse or burro in a humane manner before issuing title to that adopter.

BLM also has entered into memorandums of understanding with slaughter houses to prevent wild horses and burros from being sent illegally to those plants. Furthermore, a new policy requires that single-level trailers be used to transport animals from holding facilities to adoptions around the country.

BLM's National Training Center offers formal training covering applicable laws, regulations, and policies for wild horses and burro specialists. In May 1998, BLM's Eastern States Office held the first-ever Internet adoption, which far exceeded expectations. Because of the success of the Internet adoption and the growth of the Internet itself, BLM plans to harness this medium's potential for expanding and improving the adoption program.

BLM also has reestablished the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board, whose role is to assist and advise the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, through the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service respectively, on wild horse and burro policy formulation and oversight of the Wild Horse and Burro Program.