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# PROTECTING THE BEST OF THE WEST

*The Bureau of Land Management must start taking its conservation mandate seriously.*

Once considered the leftovers of Western settlement and land grabs, the 261 million acres of deserts, forests, river valleys, mountains, and canyons managed by the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are now in hot demand. Pressure to open more of these lands for oil and gas drilling has never been greater. Traditional uses of BLM lands, including logging, livestock grazing, and mining, continue. At the same time, expanding cities and suburbs juxtapose populations beside BLM lands as never before, and new technologies such as all-terrain vehicles make once-remote BLM lands widely accessible. Increasingly, the distinctive Western landscapes of BLM lands are a magnet for all who prize outdoor recreation—from hikers to off-road vehicle enthusiasts, from birdwatchers to hunters.

Congress, as well as past presidents and ordinary citizens, have realized (almost belatedly) that BLM lands are rich in

unique characteristics that merit conservation: wildlife, clean water, cultural and historic relics, open space, awesome scenic vistas, and soul-nourishing solitude. In recognition of the need to protect the BLM lands with the greatest richness of natural and historical resources, the Clinton administration in 2000 designated 26 million acres as the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) to help keep these stellar areas “healthy, wild, and open.”

Now, conservationists of all stripes are watching the BLM closely. They ask: Can a federal agency historically attuned to maximizing resource development also address the challenge of conservation?

A recent assessment of the condition of the NLCS—and of the BLM’s stewardship of those lands—offers a litmus test. The Wilderness Society and the World Resources Institute jointly conducted the assessment and issued results in October 2005. Our report, *State of the NLCS: A First Assessment*, finds that the NLCS’s natural and cultural resources are at risk under the BLM’s oversight.

## Prilla Smith Brackett

Although Cambridge-based artist Prilla Smith Brackett has been painting professionally for 25 years, her handling of the landscape is far from traditional. Working conceptually, she uses her work to communicate more than a literal description of a place. By fragmenting an image or juxtaposing several different images, she highlights the transience and interconnectedness of natural elements, or suggests the unseen human intrusion into seemingly pristine views.

The work of Prilla Smith Brackett was exhibited at the National Academy of Sciences in 2002 in the exhibition *Uncertain Balance*. For more information visit [www.nationalacademies.org/arts](http://www.nationalacademies.org/arts) and click on "Past Exhibitions." You can also visit the artist's website at [www.luceatlux.com](http://www.luceatlux.com).

Fortunately, the assessment also offers good news: It is not too late for the BLM, the administration, and Congress to safeguard the public treasures of the NLCS. In order to ensure that the BLM becomes a model for conservation and scientific learning in some of the nation's most special places, we recommend more funding and staffing, coupled with a commitment from leaders of the Department of the Interior, which oversees the BLM, to prioritize conservation on its premier Western lands. We also encourage a range of actions, including annual reporting and expanded volunteer programs, that would come at little cost to the agency or the federal budget.

### From rags to riches

The federal government created the BLM in 1946 by combining the General Land Office and the Grazing Service. Today, the BLM manages more public land than the Park Service, Forest Service, or Fish and Wildlife Service. One-fifth of the land in states west of the Rocky Mountains falls under the BLM's purview.

For decades, BLM lands were perceived as "the lands no one wanted" or areas most useful for cheap grazing and mineral extraction. Indeed, the BLM was known in some quarters as the "Bureau of Livestock and Mining."

Yet, in fact, BLM lands are rich in a diversity of resources in addition to oil, gas, minerals, and rangeland.

**Water.** An estimated 65% of the West's wildlife depends for survival on riparian areas: lush areas adjacent to waterways. The BLM administers 144,000 miles of riparian-lined

streams and 13 million acres of wetlands.

**Cultural resources.** The BLM manages the largest, most diverse, and most scientifically important body of cultural resources of any federal land agency. Extensive evidence of 13,000 years of human history on BLM lands ranges from prehistoric Native American archaeological sites to pioneer homesteads from the 19th and early 20th centuries. With just 6% of BLM lands surveyed for cultural resources, 263,000 cultural properties have been discovered; archaeologists estimate there are likely to be 4.5 million sites on all BLM lands. The significance of and threats to these cultural resources were underscored in 2005 when the National Trust for Historic Places listed the entire NLCS as one of the nation's most endangered historic places.

**Paleontological resources.** Fossils that are hundreds of millions of years old are preserved on BLM lands, and they provide important insight on topics such as the extinction of dinosaurs and the evolution of plant and animal communities.

**Wildlife habitat.** BLM lands are host to 228 plant and animal species listed as threatened or endangered and to more than 1,500 "sensitive" species. These lands provide 90 million acres of key habitat for big game such as antelope, mule deer, bighorn sheep, and elk. The lands also are important for 400 species of songbirds, and the future of sage grouse populations in the West will depend on the BLM's protection of their habitat.

**Ecosystem services.** Native plants on BLM lands help to prevent the spread of costly invasive weeds, reduce the risk of wildfires, and minimize soil erosion to help keep waterways clean and healthy.

**Natural playgrounds.** Recreational opportunities abound on BLM lands. In 2004, some 54 million people visited these areas to hike, camp, picnic, hunt, fish, ride horses, raft, canoe, and use off-road vehicles.

**Open space.** BLM lands are increasingly valuable places to find solitude and silence. In the lower 48 states, nearly two-thirds of BLM lands are within an hour's drive of urban areas, and 22 million people live within 25 miles of BLM lands.

All of these values are hallmarks of the NLCS. The NLCS brings together many of the BLM's most sensitive landscapes: National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas, Historic Trails, and Wild and Scenic Rivers. According to former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, the NLCS "was created to safeguard landscapes that are as spectacular in their own way as national parks." Importantly, though, NLCS areas are intended to embody a different concept than national parks by minimizing visitor facilities and the evidence of civilization's encroach-



PRILLA SMITH BRACKETT, *On the Edge of the Great Rift #3*, Oil on canvas, 48 x 20 inches, 2001.

BLM LANDS ARE RICH IN UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS THAT MERIT CONSERVATION: WILDLIFE, CLEAN WATER, CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RELICS, OPEN SPACE, AWESOME SCENIC VISTAS, AND SOUL-NOURISHING SOLITUDE.

ment to provide visitors a chance to see the West through the eyes of the first native peoples and pioneers.

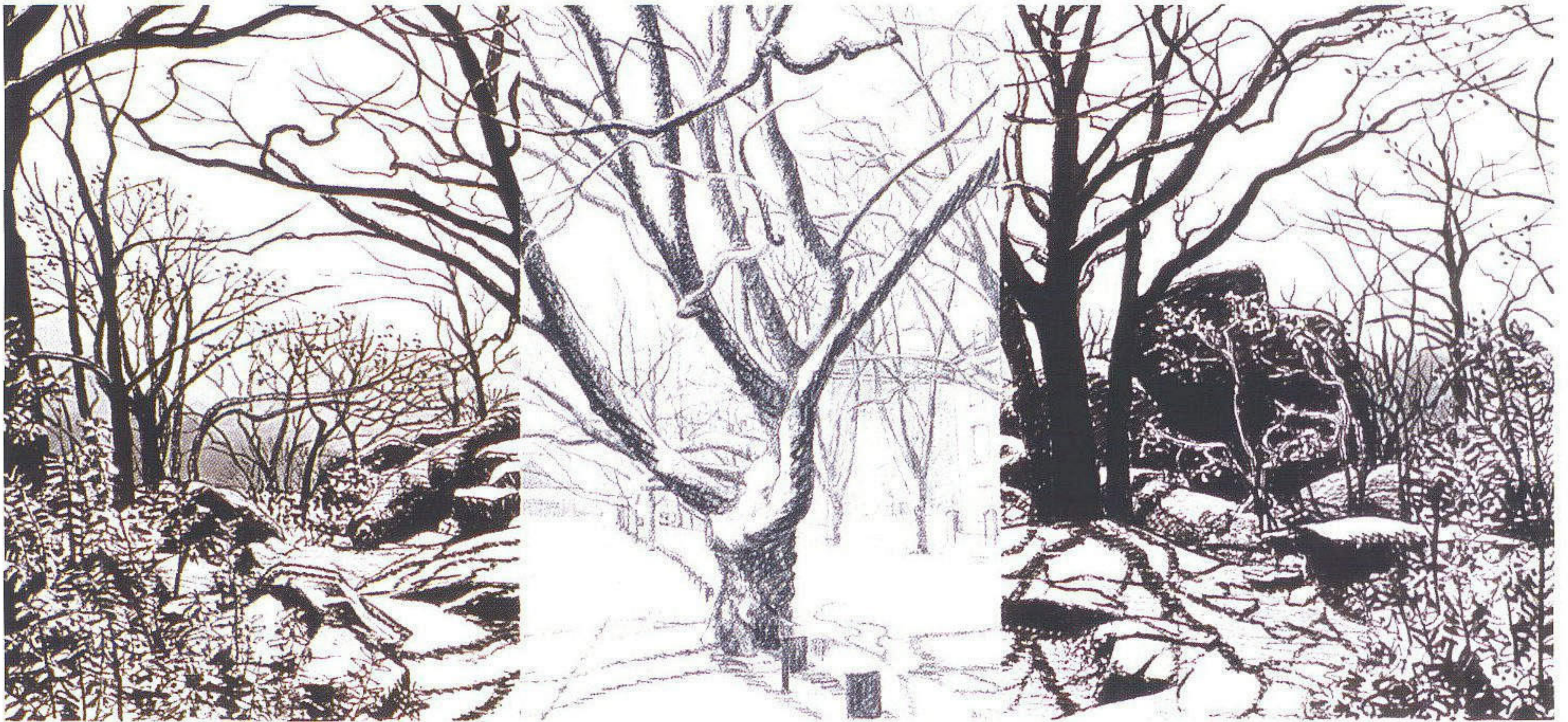
Unlike the National Park Service, with its clear mandate to conserve natural and historical resources, the BLM must manage its lands and waters for a variety of uses that can and do conflict. In 2004, the BLM reported that 224 million of its 261 million acres were available for energy and mineral exploration and development. The agency manages approximately 53,000 oil, gas, coal, and geothermal leases, and 220,000 hardrock mining claims. In addition, 159 million acres are in livestock grazing allotments. Another 11 million acres are forest, much of which the BLM manages for commercial logging, as in western Oregon, where 0.5 million of the 2.4 million forest acres are managed intensively for timber production.

Accordingly, the BLM maintains that it is a multiple-use agency, while acknowledging that conservation is part of its mission. Indeed, federal regulations make it clear that multiple use does not trump the need for the BLM to also meet

conservation goals and manage for recreation, scenic, scientific, and historical values. Although the agency can allow resource development even if it will cause degradation, its discretion is not unlimited. Moreover, the agency holds considerable—but underused—authority to restrict environmentally adverse activities to protect the land and its flora and fauna.

The BLM's conservation responsibility and authority derive primarily from the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. This legislation makes clear that rare and special places could be protected from other competing or damaging uses and that multiple use does not mean that every acre must or should be available for all uses. In this way, BLM lands taken as a whole serve multiple uses, leaving ample room, even an obligation, to manage special places with conservation goals as paramount over other uses.

In fact, the BLM has legal directives to preserve most of the 26 million acres of the NLCS, particularly National Monuments and Wilderness Areas. Although the designa-



PRILLA SMITH BRACKETT, *Linkage #4*, Ink and pencil on paper, 6.5 x 4 inches, 2002.

tion of the NLCS itself carries no statutory authority, the individual pieces of the system were each designated via specific authorizing legislation that impart a specific conservation purpose. These include the Antiquities Act of 1906, the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, and the National Trails System Act of 1968.

### Skewed policy agenda

The BLM's policy agenda, however, has often been dominated by considerations that can work against conservation. The nation's rising energy needs are placing particular pressures on BLM lands. In order to expedite oil and gas leasing and development, the agency is briskly leasing wild lands, despite a backlog of leases and drilling permits still unused by the oil and gas industry and record levels of permits issued nationally. Since 2003, the BLM has continually offered oil and gas leases on spectacular roadless lands in Utah and Colorado that have been identified (in many instances by the agency itself) as harboring wilderness values. More than 50,000 acres in proposed Colorado Wilderness Areas have been leased in the past two years alone, and more than 100,000 acres in Utah have been offered at lease auctions.

Recent BLM management plans open almost entire areas to oil and gas development. In three recent draft and final land-use plans affecting 8.6 million acres (Greater Otero Mesa in New Mexico, the Great Divide in Wyoming, and the Vernal Field Office in Utah), 97% of the total area is proposed to be open to oil and gas development. In an August 2005 speech to the Rocky Mountain Natural Gas Strategy Conference, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Rebecca Watson listed as a notable accomplishment that the BLM is processing applications for drilling permits in record numbers, with the current administration issuing more than 17,000 permits during the past four years, 74% more than the Clinton administration. The BLM estimates that it will process more than 12,000 drilling permits in the next fiscal year.

A June 2005 report by the Government Accountability Office found that the BLM's rush to drill keeps the agency too busy to monitor and enforce clean air and water laws. During the past six years, the number of drilling permits issued annually by the BLM tripled from 1,803 to 6,399. Four of the eight BLM field offices that issued 75% of these drilling permits did not have any plans in place to monitor natural or cultural resources. The report noted that BLM staffers were too busy processing drilling permit applications to have time to develop the monitoring plans.

In addition, the BLM, like other federal land management

agencies, has long been caught in the jobs-versus-the-environment debate, which creates pressure to keep public lands open to oil and gas development, mining, and logging. But recent economic analysis is helping to dispel the perception that conservation on public lands is incompatible with economic prosperity.

A 2004 study by the Sonoran Institute found that protected public lands, including BLM lands such as National Monuments, are increasingly important to the economy of western communities. The changing western economy means that historically important resource extraction sectors provide fewer jobs comparatively; personal income from resource industries such as mining, oil and gas development, and ranching represent just 8% of total personal income, down from 20% in 1970, although there is wide variation among states. Meanwhile, counties with protected public lands or close to protected public lands tend to have the fastest local economic growth. Areas in and around protected areas are most likely to attract business owners, an educated work force, producer services, investment income, retirees, and real estate development, which are factors of a diverse and growing economy. For example, since the designation of the BLM's Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah in 1996, neighboring Garfield County has experienced a shift from wages declining at a rate of 6% to wage rate growth of 7%, as well as declines in unemployment and significant growth in personal income. Still, as long as the mythology of jobs versus environment prevails, the BLM is vulnerable to pressure from rural western communities, politicians, and extractive industries, who argue that a federal emphasis on conservation will set up roadblocks to productive uses of natural resources.

Another factor muddling the picture is the BLM's budget structure. With its many categories and subcategories, the structure effectively discourages program integration and limits budgetary accountability. For example, the NLCS receives funding from at least seven different budget categories and subcategories, making it difficult for the BLM and members of the public to calculate the amount of money devoted to the NLCS. There also is a significant mismatch between congressional budgets and the nature of the work that the BLM performs. The BLM's work is governed by multiple-use mandates and is ecosystem-based. Ecosystem management is a multiyear process that requires secure, consistent funding and adequate data. Congressional budget authorizations, on the other hand, normally cover only one year at a time and thus pose a significant impediment to planning and implementing longer-term projects needed to restore or protect ecosystems.

## A JUNE 2005 REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE FOUND THAT THE BLM'S RUSH TO DRILL KEEPS THE AGENCY TOO BUSY TO MONITOR AND ENFORCE CLEAN AIR AND WATER LAWS.

Because the BLM doesn't include a separate budget line for the NLCS within its agency budget, and because of reallocations of funding and other cuts during the year, it is difficult to determine the amount that was allocated to the NLCS in the past fiscal year (FY 2006), or this year (FY 2007). Best estimates, however, make it clear that the NLCS operates with bare-bones funding—probably about \$42 million for FY 2006, with even less for FY 2007. For comparison, consider that the NLCS budget is roughly 2.5% of the BLM's \$1.8 billion budget, for 10% of the agency's most precious lands and waters. The NLCS's funding is less than half of the allocation for the BLM's energy and minerals management program, for which \$108 million was appropriated for FY 2006, with \$135 million proposed for FY 2007. NLCS funding also is a fraction of the funding for comparable land management agencies. The 2006 budget for NLCS translates to about \$1.70 per acre, compared to the roughly \$5 per acre that goes to the National Wildlife Refuge System and \$19 per acre to the National Park Service. Funding for land acquisition by the four major federal land management agencies, including the BLM, via the Land and Water Conservation Fund, has declined by 80% in the past decade.

### **Taking stock of stewardship**

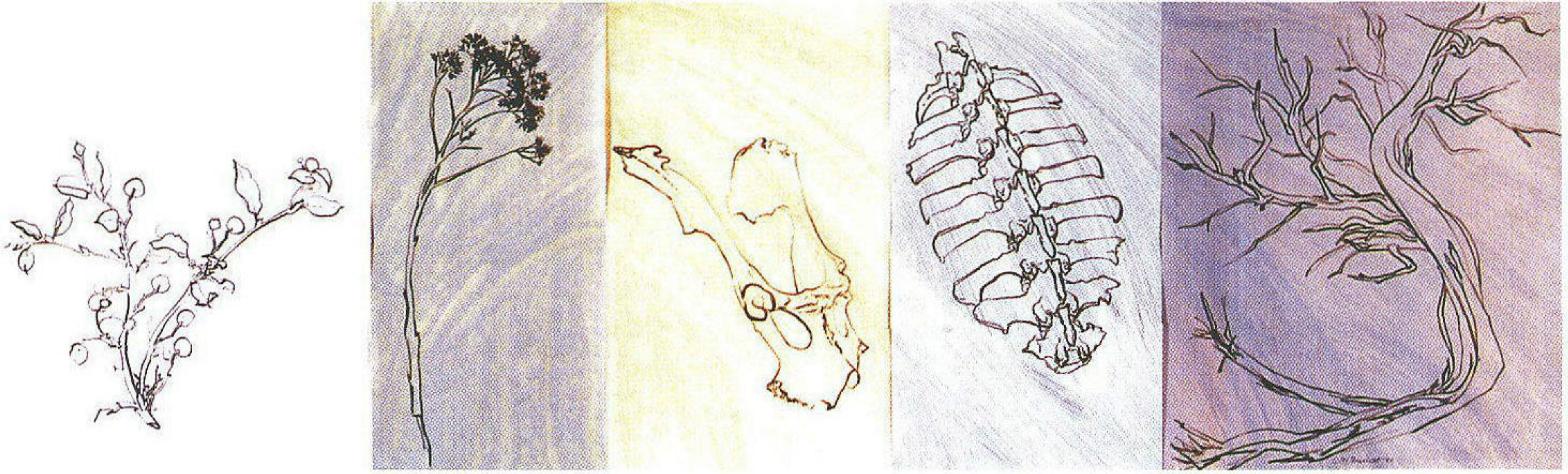
Good management practice dictates that the BLM should establish a regular means of assessing the condition of its special areas in order to provide early warning of change, make conservation a priority among its other important objectives, help determine budgets, and provide the pub-

lic and Congress the means to gauge progress and hold the agency accountable.

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) provides an impetus for land management agencies to plan, implement, monitor, and report on progress toward performance goals. And, in keeping with the GPRA framework, the BLM's 2004 annual report cites several goals and accomplishments for resource protection, such as statistics on acres of riparian land restored and cultural resources stabilized.

What these general overview data do not offer is a full picture of trends, conditions, and conservation stewardship capacity. In particular, the ability to gauge whether the BLM is meeting the unique conservation mandates of National Monuments and other places typically set aside to protect specific wildlife, plants, and their habitat, as well as large ecosystems and wilderness, is shortchanged. Nor does the BLM produce annual reports for individual National Monuments and Conservation Areas with consistent, regular, and quantitative measures of progress toward specific conservation goals.

In order to fill this void, the Wilderness Society and World Resources Institute undertook a preliminary assessment to determine whether the BLM is meeting its conservation mandate. We decided to focus on the NLCS because its areas carry a clear conservation aim via proclamation or legislation, and because, by mandate, the BLM currently is creating management plans that will institutionalize conservation objectives for areas within the system.



PRILLA SMITH BRACKETT, *Earth Sayings #3*, Acrylic on vellum mounted on paper, 42 x 12.5 inches, 1999.

For simplicity's sake, we kept the scope of our assessment relatively narrow. We focused on 15 specially designated areas or "units" in the NLCS, some selected to reflect geographic and ecosystem diversity and others selected randomly. We then homed in on issues relevant to stewardship and ecosystem condition, such as accountability, natural resource monitoring, cultural resource protection, and visitor management. For each issue, we identified a series of indicators and measures: 35 indicators in total. For example, we used the degree to which an area is fragmented by roads as one measure of ecosystem health.

Overall, we found that the BLM is woefully lacking in funds, leadership, and data to achieve its conservation mission on NLCS lands. In our report, we include a scorecard that summarizes our findings by issue and NLCS unit. Grades of C's and D's dominate for issues such as the capacity to protect wild and untouched areas and to monitor special natural resources. Although the NLCS as a whole scored no higher than a C for any issue, some individual areas merited A's and B's for select aspects of stewardship and conservation. In particular, we found:

***An understaffed and inadequately empowered conservation system.*** NLCS managers (the BLM staffers responsible for the day-to-day management of individual NLCS units) have neither the stature nor the authority to serve as the public face of conservation for the BLM's special landscapes and to ensure that conservation is prioritized by their agency. Only one-third of the managers interviewed are vested with line authority: the formal authority to direct staff, with

clear, consistent responsibilities to make decisions, issue orders, and allocate resources.

Most BLM National Monuments and Conservation Areas are understaffed, mostly because of funding constraints. Most areas lack dedicated time from archaeologists, ecologists, law enforcement rangers, and public education specialists. For example, only one-third of the 15 Monuments and Conservation Areas examined have more than one full-time law enforcement ranger; several have only a half-time ranger. A ranger must patrol, on average, 200,000 acres, making it impossible to check remote areas or specific sites regularly. Growth in enforcement staff needs to keep pace with growth in use; in some areas, visitor numbers have quadrupled in the past five years.

Although most National Monuments were designated under the Antiquities Act for "scientific study" and many Conservation Areas offer excellent scientific learning opportunities for scientists, students, and members of local communities, few of them have the staff to capitalize on those objectives. About 80% of National Monuments and Conservation Areas have a public education specialist, but typically this is less than a full-time or even half-time outreach professional. As one BLM staff member said, "We always identify in our work plans that we're going to use environmental education and interpretation as a major tool to get public compliance with land stewardship, but then we fail to fund environmental education, or try to add it to an already overburdened staff person."

***A paucity of natural resource monitoring and trend***

**data.** Large data gaps make it difficult, even impossible, for the BLM to effectively manage its conservation lands and waters. For example, only 4 of 15 National Monuments and Conservation Areas conducted complete inventories for invasive weeds, and rarely do Monuments and Conservation Areas have comprehensive water-quality monitoring programs.

Collecting more data is not always the priority need. Our queries of BLM staff suggest that in some places, much detailed data already is available on key indicators of resource condition. For example, the *Headwaters Forest Reserve* in California has summarized trend data for threatened and endangered species into an easy-to-interpret format. More often, however, the data are not rendered into useful information; they are not compiled, integrated, and analyzed to facilitate place-specific assessments by NLCS managers.

Data on recreational activities, which are important for gauging pressures on resources and deciding how many law enforcement rangers are needed, and where, are fraught with inconsistency. The BLM does track total visitors to each part of the NLCS, as well as nearly a dozen recreational uses. However, during the past five years, some NLCS units have changed how they measure visitor use, rendering trend data nearly useless.

**Ecosystem health: Condition unknown.** Data to assess ecosystem condition in the NLCS are poor, due in part to the lack of comprehensive and consistent place-specific monitoring programs. One significant concern is the degree to which wildlife habitat is fragmented by roads and routes. On average, 76% of land in the 15 areas examined is within one mile of a road, and 90% is within 2 miles of a road. Abundant research has demonstrated that roads can have a negative impact on wildlife at these distances, and they also facilitate damage from off-road vehicles, the invasion of non-native animal and plant species, and the spread of fires.

Available data reflect widely varying land health conditions systemwide. For example, 95% of the riparian areas assessed in Colorado's Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area were judged to be in "proper functioning condition" (meaning that they are able to minimize erosion, improve water quality, and support biodiversity). In contrast, only 7% of the streams in Colorado's Canyons of the Ancients National Monument meet the proper functioning standard. Similarly, invasive species problems range from areas where nearly all of the land—tens of thousands of acres—is affected, to areas with virtually none affected.

**Endangered cultural resources.** The condition of cultural resources is difficult to summarize, because the BLM lacks the capacity to adequately monitor cultural sites. Indeed, the agency has comprehensively inventoried cultural

resources in just 6 to 7% of the total area encompassed by Monuments and Conservation Areas. Some of the archaeologists interviewed thought the majority of their sites were in stable condition, but all described sites they knew were at risk, typically due to erosion, accessibility, looting, or careless campers.

The majority of cultural inventories are carried out when a drilling or grazing permit, power line, or other development is proposed and the BLM must meet its legal obligation to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act and assess impacts to cultural resources in those permit areas. With the rapid increase in permit application processing, too often these cultural resource compliance surveys are conducted late in the process: not when the agency is considering whether to lease, but after private investments have already been made. And, unfortunately, many BLM archaeologists report that the majority of their time (60 to 70%) is occupied by compliance work related to proposed development. Few have time or funds to undertake landscape-scale archaeological surveys in areas of highest priority to inform land-use plans, road closures, and the management of public access and recreation.

### **Reinventing a conservation agency**

Elevating and advancing the BLM's conservation mission, especially in the face of conflicting priorities and pressures, requires actions by the agency, Congress, and concerned stakeholders nationwide.

Among the steps that the BLM can take, some will require a shift in priorities, but most will require only modest amounts of funding. For example, the BLM should:

**Undertake regular indicator-driven conservation assessments.** The old business adage "you manage what you measure" applies equally to the BLM and conservation. Setting specific conservation goals for the NLCS and measuring progress toward them would help the agency focus on conservation as a priority, and reward progress. The indicators of progress need not be all or only the ones that we used in State of the NLCS; indeed, the BLM should engage in a process with nongovernmental organizations and other partners to agree on a set of measures for natural and cultural resource health. The agency should then commit to tracking those indicators at the NLCS unit level in annual or biennial reports. This would enable basic public oversight and foster informed participation in public lands planning, management, and protection. Reports undoubtedly would improve the public's impression of the BLM as an accountable and capable conservation organization. (We recently learned that the BLM does plan to begin issuing annual reports on

**THE BLM IS WOEFULLY LACKING IN FUNDS, LEADERSHIP, AND DATA TO ACHIEVE ITS CONSERVATION MISSION FOR NLCS LANDS AND WATERS.**



PRILLA SMITH BRACKETT, *Remnants: Big Reed Reserve #5*, Acrylic on collaged paper and oil on canvas, 60 x 30 inches, 1997.

its NLCS National Monuments and Conservation Areas in 2006; it remains to be seen what data and quantitative measures of progress the reports will include).

**Plan for resource conservation.** The BLM is still crafting “Resource Management Plans” (the BLM’s term for land-use plans) for about half of its National Monuments and Conservation Areas. These plans, which serve as blueprints for decisionmaking for up to two decades, are a sterling opportunity to provide clear and unequivocal conservation guidance. For example, plans should give direction regarding species monitoring and water-quality monitoring, and they should include a cultural resource protection program. Also critical is the inclusion of a plan for roads and travel within the areas that minimizes damage from motorized vehicle use and closes unnecessary or damaging roads, with a specific time frame for closures.

**Replicate best practices for conservation.** The State of the NLCS report identifies more than a dozen laudable examples of BLM projects that are creatively improving or protecting resources in NLCS areas. For example, in Arizona’s Agua Fria National Monument, volunteers and students record petroglyphs, whereas in Idaho’s Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area, BLM staff place signs and paths strategically to guide visitors away from overused campsites and reduce off-road driving to prime locations for raptor viewing. Also in Idaho, at Craters of the Moon National Monument, the BLM found that adding the image of an American flag to signs along roads and trails discourages the use of the signs for target practice, reducing the need for their costly replacement. To encourage such best practices, restoration or land protection ideas could be shared at an annual BLM “NLCS Conservation Congress” and highlighted with annual BLM conservation awards for outstanding personnel and projects.

**Expand site steward programs and volunteer programs.** More than half of the National Monuments and Conservation Areas examined benefit from strong and effective cultural resource stewardship programs that use volunteers—often archaeologists themselves—as site monitors, educators, and protectors of special places. These volunteers help short-handed BLM staff and enhance the agency’s capacity to accomplish its goals. Volunteers in many areas also assist with natural resource protection and restoration, undertaking tasks such as removing invasive plants and converting unnecessary roads to foot, horseback, and mountain-bike use.

For its part, Congress can play a major role in reinventing the BLM as a conservation agency. It should:

**Give the NLCS a statutory basis.** Just as the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 provides the Department of the Interior with a clear management mandate for parks, the NLCS needs a similar basic law to guide its management. Congress should provide that law in the form of an NLCS “organic” act giving BLM a clear mission of protecting the NLCS. An NLCS Act need not change existing uses of NLCS lands but could help prioritize and clarify the BLM’s conservation agenda.

**Increase funding for BLM conservation.** Congressional funding priorities should include appropriations for natural resource monitoring, cultural resources inventory and monitoring, habitat restoration, and law enforcement, particularly in areas where visitor use is growing most rapidly or resources are most fragile. Another priority is funding the implementation of Resource Management Plans for various NLCS units that the BLM is scheduled to complete in 2006 and 2007.

Additional funding for land acquisition also is critical for the BLM to fend off encroaching residential and commercial development of private inholdings, and to create buffer zones around its most special ecosystems. One source of revenue for conservation budgets could be some of the hundreds of millions of dollars generated from mineral development on BLM lands.

**Reorient the BLM budget structure toward conservation.** Congress should create a budget category for management activities devoted to conservation and ecological restoration. Currently, conservation funds are scattered in several diverse budget categories. A subcategory of the new conservation/ecological restoration budget category should be devoted to the NLCS.

This is a time of great challenge for the NLCS. Without BLM leadership, congressional funding, and citizen involvement, significant segments of the NLCS are likely to suffer serious degradation, possibly forever. The path forward is clear: It is up to the nation to seize the opportunity to protect some of its greatest public lands.

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