

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR **BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**
National
BLM and Its Predecessors

The BLM's roots go back to the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. These laws provided for the survey and settlement of the lands that the original 13 colonies ceded to the Federal government after the War of Independence.

As additional lands were acquired by the United States from Spain, France, and other countries, Congress directed that they be explored, surveyed, and made available for settlement. In 1812, Congress established the General Land Office in the Department of the Treasury to oversee the disposition of these Federal lands. As the 19th century progressed and the Nation's land base expanded further west, Congress encouraged the settlement of the land by enacting a wide variety of laws, including the Homesteading Laws and the Mining Law of 1872.

These statutes served one of the major policy goals of the young country: settlement of the Western territories. With the exception of the Mining Law of 1872 and the Desert Land Act of 1877 (which was amended), all have since been repealed or superseded by other statutes.

The late 19th century marked a shift in Federal land management priorities with the creation of the first national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges. By withdrawing these lands from settlement, Congress signaled a shift in the policy goals served by the public lands. Instead of using them to promote settlement, Congress recognized that they should be held in public ownership because of their other resource values.

In the early 20th century, Congress took additional steps toward recognizing the value of the assets on public lands and directed the Executive Branch to manage activities on the remaining public lands. The Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 allowed leasing, exploration, and production of selected commodities, such as coal, oil, gas, and sodium, to take place on public lands. The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 established the U.S. Grazing Service to manage the public rangelands. And the Oregon and California Act of 1937 required sustained yield management of the timberlands in western Oregon.

In 1946, the Grazing Service was merged with the General Land Office to form the Bureau of Land Management within the Department of the Interior. When the BLM was initially created, there were over 2,000 unrelated and often conflicting laws for managing the public lands. The BLM had no unified legislative mandate until Congress enacted the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).

In FLPMA, Congress recognized the value of the remaining public lands by declaring that these lands would remain in public ownership. Congress also gave us the term "multiple-use" management, defined as "management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people."