

Public Lands and Recreation

The United States encompasses a vast land area with a wide variety of landscapes and land uses.

The 48 contiguous states comprise about 1.9 billion acres of land, of which about three-fourths is in private hands and the rest owned by the federal, state, and local governments. With the addition of

managed by a relatively few federal agencies—the Interior Department’s Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and National Park Service (NPS), and the Agriculture Department’s Forest Service (FS) (Figure 3.1).

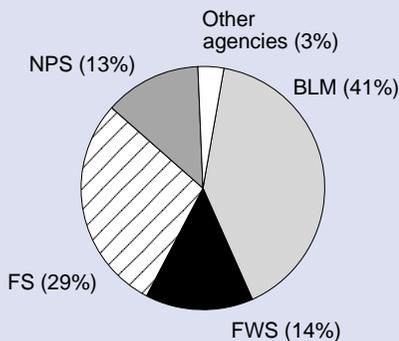
BLM manages 264 million acres of federal land, mostly in 12 Western states (including Alaska), for a variety of public uses and values, including grazing, outdoor recreation, watershed protection, wildlife habitat conservation, timber harvesting, and mining.

Many commercial activities occur on BLM lands. There are some 340,000 unpatented mining claims, 51,000 oil and gas leases, and grazing is authorized on 169 million acres. About 42,000 wild horses and burros roam BLM lands, and about 8,700 are adopted annually.

As with the other federal land management agencies, BLM is often faced with trying to minimize conflicts across a mix of ecological, aesthetic, and economic values.

The Forest Service manages 188 million acres of federal lands in the National Forest System in 44 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands and about 4 million acres in the National Grasslands System in

Figure 3.1 Federal Land by Agency, 1997



Source: See Part III, Table 3.1.

Notes: BLM = Bureau of Land Management. FS = U.S. Forest Service. FWS = U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. NPS = National Park Service. Total federal land = 662 million acres. Excludes trust properties.

Alaska and Hawaii as states, total land area jumped to about 2.26 billion acres, including about 662 million acres owned by the federal government. Most of this land is

12 states. The agency's mandated management objectives include watershed management, wildlife habitat and biodiversity protection, outdoor recreation, and range and timber management.

The Fish and Wildlife Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which comprises more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores national significant fisheries, and conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands.

The National Park Service manages about 83 million acres in 376 natural, cultural, and historical sites around the nation. There are a wide variety of units—national parks, national monuments, national preserves, national historic sites, national battlefields, national seashores, national recreation areas, etc.—but all units of the system have equal legal

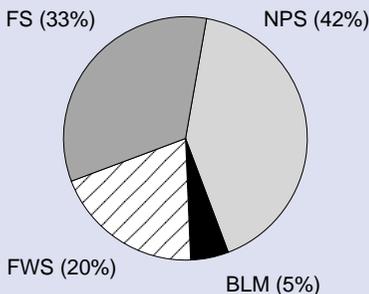
standing. The largest area is Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in Alaska, which at 13.2 million acres is more than 16 percent of the entire system.

Under the original National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, the agency is directed to manage the parks “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historical objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Several other laws provide special protections for portions of the nation's lands. The Wilderness Act of 1964 established the National Wilderness Preservation System. Wilderness is land retaining its primeval character and influence, affected primarily by the forces of nature, with human influence substantially unnoticeable. Wilderness areas are designated by Congress and are composed of existing federal lands that have retained a wilderness character and meet criteria found in the act. The U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management manage most of the wilderness land (Figure 3.2). Federal land managers are required to manage wilderness areas to retain their wilderness character.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 preserves certain selected rivers that possess outstanding scenic, recreational, geological, cultural, or historic values and maintain their free-flowing condition. Rivers like Maine's Allagash, the Snake in Oregon and Idaho, Colorado's Cache La Poudre, the Saline bayou in Louisiana, and the Kings of California are among the designated. The Clinton Administration

Figure 3.2 Wilderness Area Management by Agency, 1997



Source: See Part III, Table 3.2.
Notes: BLM = Bureau of Land Management. FS = U.S. Forest Service. FWS = U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. NPS = National Park Service. Total wilderness land = 103.6 million acres

Box 3.1
The American Heritage Rivers Initiative

Following his 1997 State of the Union address, President Clinton signed an executive order establishing the American Heritage Rivers Initiative. The initiative will integrate the economic, environmental, and historic preservation programs and services of federal agencies to benefit communities engaged in efforts to protect their rivers.

The program is intended to support outstanding community-based efforts designed to ensure the vitality of the river in community life for future generations. Participation is voluntary and must be initiated by the community. Designation will not impose any new regulations or other new requirements.

Following the president's call for nominations, the Administration received 126 applications from communities in 46 states and the District of Columbia. Each application included a detailed action plan describing the communities' vision for protecting natural resources, promoting economic revitalization, and preserving cultural heritage.

In July 1998, President Clinton designated 14 American Heritage Rivers. Communities along these rivers will receive federal support over the next five years to carry out their plans for revitalizing their rivers and riverfronts.

For more information, visit the American Heritage Rivers homepage (<http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/heritage/rivers.html>) or the CEQ web site (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/CEQ/Rivers/>).

recently established the American Heritage Rivers Initiative, a new program to help communities restore and revitalize waters and waterfronts (See Box 3.1.)

The National Trails System Act of 1968 establishes a national system of recreational, scenic, and historic trails and prescribes the methods and standards for adding components to the system.

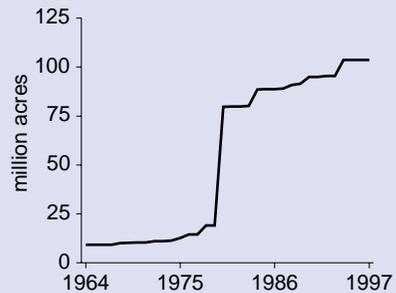
TRENDS

Since the early 1980s, the area of land managed by the various federal land management agencies has been fairly stable. (Part III, Table 3.1)

The National Wilderness Preservation System grew from slightly over 10 million acres in 1970 to nearly 80 million acres in 1980. The dramatic increase was largely attributable to the designation of

national parks, wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas in Alaska. Over the 1980-89 period, the wilderness system gained about 11 million acres, growing from 80 to 91 million acres; since 1989, it has

Figure 3.3 National Wilderness Preservation System, 1964-1997



Source: See Part III, Table 3.2.
Notes: Data reflect year-end cumulative totals. The large increase in acreage in 1980 is largely attributable to designation of wilderness areas in Alaska.

jumped about 12 million acres, reaching 103.6 million acres in 1997 (Figure 3.3).

The National Wild and Scenic River System continued to expand in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1980, there were 5,662 river-miles in the wild and scenic river system. By 1989, the system had grown by 63 percent, to 9,281 river miles. Over the 1990-97 period, the system grew

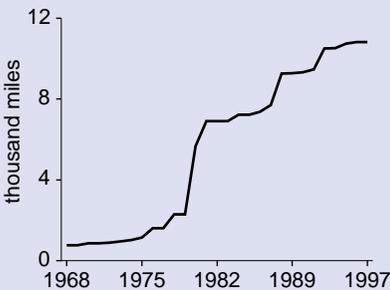
conserve, protect, and enhance the biodiversity, ecological integrity, and cultural legacy of the nation's marine environment. Ranging from American Samoa to New England, they include Pacific and Atlantic haunts of whales, sea lions, sharks, rays, and turtles; significant coral reefs and kelp forest habitats; and the remains of the Monitor Civil War shipwreck off North Carolina.

Historic properties are also protected under the National Historic Preservation Act. By 1997, over 68,000 properties were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (Part III, Table 3.4) Included among the listings are: all historic areas in the National Park System; over 2,200 National Historic Landmarks, which have been designated by the Secretary of the Interior because of their importance to all Americans; and properties across the country that have been nominated by governments, organizations, and individuals because they are significant to the nation, to a state, or to a community. A few properties are lost each year as a result of fire, flood, wind, or other natural causes or as a result of demolition.

In addition, the National Scenic Byways program recognizes outstanding byways that exemplify the regional characteristics of our nation. These outstanding qualities can be archeological, cultural, historical, natural, recreational, or scenic. The finest byways are designated as All-American roads. The Secretary of Transportation designated the first All-American roads and National Scenic Byways in 1996 (<http://www.byways.org>).

In 1996, nearly 77 million U.S. residents, about 36 percent of the U.S. popu-

Figure 3.4 National Wild and Scenic Rivers, 1968-1997



Source: See Part III, Table 3.2.

Notes: Data reflect year-end cumulative totals. The large increase in river mileage in 1980 is largely attributable to designation of wild and scenic rivers in Alaska.

another 16 percent, to 10,815 river miles (Figure 3.4). (Part III, Table 3.2)

Since the mid-1970s, the nation has developed new systems to protect estuaries and sensitive marine areas. By 1997, there were 21 National Estuarine Research Reserves totaling 427,520 acres, and 12 National Marine Sanctuaries totaling 13,837 square nautical miles (Figure 3.5). (Part III, Table 3.3). The 21 reserves provide a nationwide network of protected areas dedicated to enhancing research, education, and scientific understanding of the nation's diverse estuarine and coastal habitats. The 12 sanctuaries

lation 16 years old and older, enjoyed some activity relating to fish and wildlife. Almost 40 million people spent time fishing and/or hunting and 63 million people enjoyed wildlife activities such as observing, feeding, or photographing wildlife. The trend in fishing and hunting participation from 1991 to 1996 was level while participation in wildlife watching dropped 17 percent. However, the trend in spending for all wildlife-related recreation increased sharply. Sportsmen spent over \$72 billion dollars in 1996 and wildlife watching participants

spent nearly \$30 billion for the year. Participation rates and expenditures varied across the country (Figure 3.6) (Part III, Table 3.5).

The popularity of saltwater fishing continues to be strong. The estimated number of Atlantic and Gulf coast fishing trips made between 1993 and 1997 remained at about 58 million while the number of fish caught and total weight of fish declined from the highs in the mid-1980s (Figure 3.7). (Part III, Table 3.6) Along the Atlantic and Gulf coast in 1997, 7 million marine recreational fish-

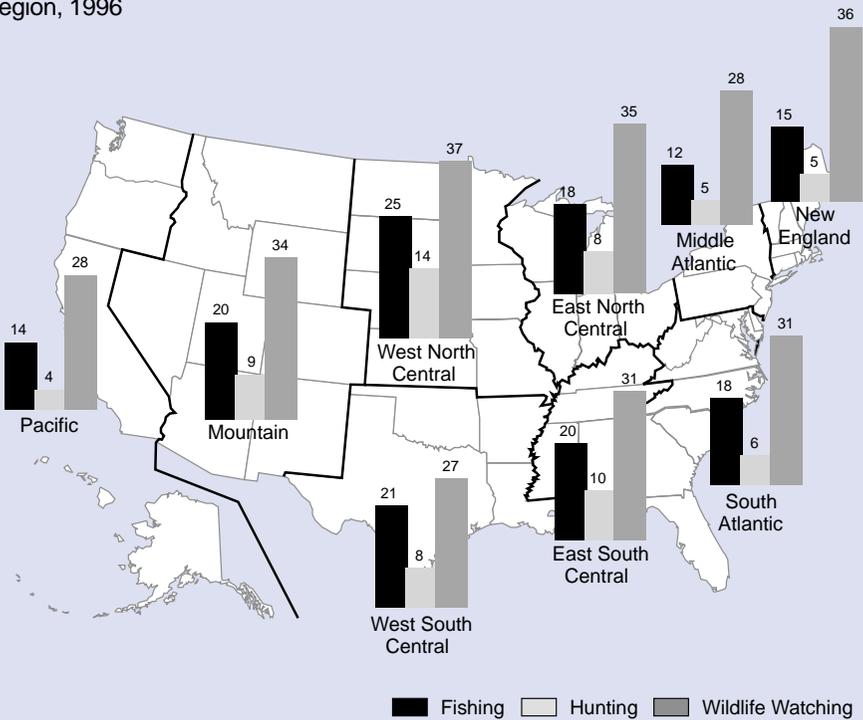
Figure 3.5 National Marine Sanctuaries and National Estuarine Research Reserves, 1997



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Sanctuaries and Reserves Division, Washington, DC, 1998.

Notes: Locations of sanctuaries and reserves are approximate. Jobs Bay, Puerto Rico NERR not to scale. Numbers are a point of reference only.

Figure 3.6 Participation in Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation by Region, 1996



Source: U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation: State Overview (DOI, FWS, Washington, DC, 1997).

Note: Numbers refer to percent of regional population.

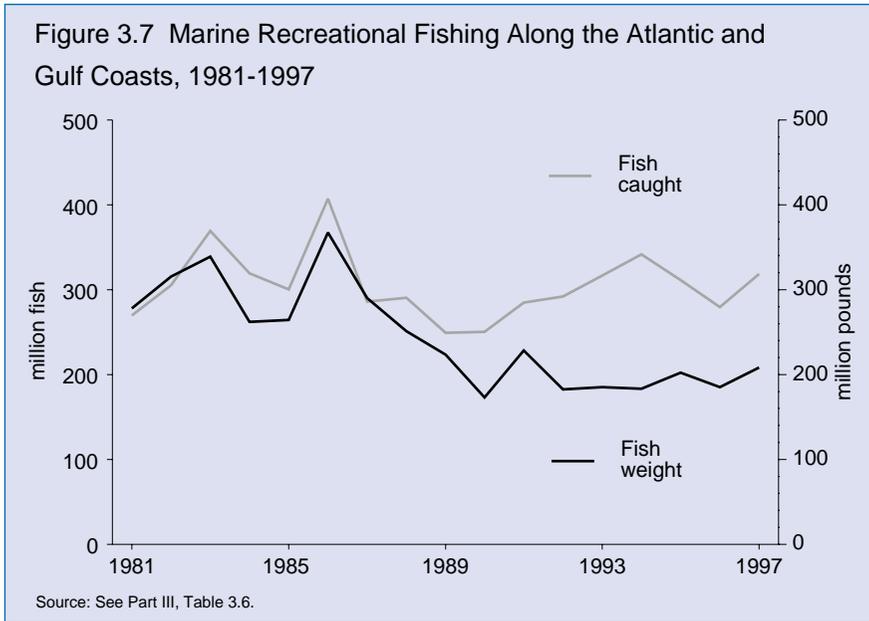
ing participants took 61 million trips and caught a total of 337 million fish. By sub-region, the Gulf of Mexico accounted for the highest numbers of fish caught followed by the Mid-Atlantic. Along the Pacific coast in 1997, 1.8 million marine recreational fishing participants took 7.2 million trips and caught a total of 29 million fish. Seventy-two percent of the trips were made in California, followed by 20 percent in Washington, and 8 percent in Oregon.

Visits to federal recreation areas, particularly national parks and national

forests, have increased significantly since 1977. For the National Park System, visits rose from 211 million in 1977 to 275 million in 1997, or about 30 percent. In National Forests, the number of visitors rose from 205 million in 1977 to 341 million in 1996, or about 66 percent. (Part III, Table 3.7)

ONLINE RESOURCES

The Department of Interior maintains a large website with a vast amount of



information. The site (<http://www.doi.gov>) includes a category on the agency's various bureaus and links to the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey, Minerals Management Service, and others. Another category, "About DOI," includes a history of the agency, organization chart, and strategic plan (<http://www.doi.gov/about.html>).

The Fish and Wildlife Service maintains an Internet site with extensive information on the National Wildlife Refuge System (<http://refuges.fws.gov>). Information ranges from wildlife habitat and management programs to visitor activities, cultural resources, history of the refuge system, overviews of legislative operating authorities, and phone numbers and mailing addresses of individual refuges.

Within the National Park Service site, one can find numerous sites with useful

information on public lands and recreation, such as information on the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (<http://www.nps.gov/rivers/>). The site includes a Wild and Scenic Rivers List and text of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, along with information about the Wild and Scenic Rivers Council, rivers and trails assistance, river managing agencies, state programs, and other information. The site links to state programs in Minnesota, New Hampshire, Ohio, and South Carolina.

The site also includes links to a long list of organizations with an interest in rivers, including America Outdoors, the American Canoe Association, American Rivers, the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, the International Rivers Network, the Izaak Walton League, the Pacific Rivers Council, and River Network.

The NPS site provides information about the National Trails System (http://www.nps.gov/htdocs1/pub_aff/nal-tral.htm), including a list of National Scenic Trails and National Historic Trails. Many other sites provide information about trails and hiking. The American Hiking Society (<http://www.americanhiking.org/>) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting hiking and to establishing, protecting, and maintaining foot trails in America. Another noteworthy site is maintained by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (<http://www.railtrails.org>), which is interested in converting abandoned railroad tracks into public biking and walking trails.

The National Park Service site also provides access to the National Register of Historic Places (<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/nrhome.html>). This site includes a link to the National Register Information System, which houses data on all places listed in or determined eligible for the National Register. Also noteworthy is the site maintained by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (<http://www.nationaltrust.org/>).

The other principal federal government site is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (<http://www.usda.gov>), which through the Forest Service manages the National Forest System. The Forest Service site (<http://www.fs.fed.us>), under its data and information category (<http://www.fs.fed.us/database/>), provides information and databases on national forests, land areas of the national forest system, and forest land distribution data for the United States. The agency's "links" category (<http://www.fs.fed.us/links/topics.shtml>) includes topics such as forest

management, cooperative forestry, national forests, NEPA, state and private forestry, and forest health.

Within the Department of Transportation, the Coast Guard's Recreational Boating Safety Program assists states and U.S. territories with programs to protect recreational boaters (<http://uscgboating.org>).

Many private and nonprofit groups have a strong interest in public lands and recreation. Several web directory sites provide access to many of these groups, including the Environmental Organization Web Directory (<http://www.webdirectory.com/>) and EcoNet (<http://www.igc.org/econet/index.html>).

Recreation.Gov (<http://www.recreation.gov>) is a one-stop resource for information about recreation on federal lands. Recreation.Gov offers information from all of the federal land management agencies and allows visitors to search for recreation sites by state, by agency, or by recreational activity. The agencies participating in the system include the Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and National Park Service.

One organization with a particular interest in the National Park System is the National Parks and Conservation Organization (<http://www.npca.org/home/npca/>). This site includes links devoted to the National Parks and to park activist groups. Similarly, the National Wildlife Refuge Association is an advocacy organization for the National Wildlife Refuge System (<http://refugenet.org>).

The Trust for Public Land promotes the importance of public land, helps

communities establish land-protection goals, and has pioneered new ways to finance parks and open space (<http://www.igc.apc.org/tpl/>). The Nature Conservancy (<http://www.tnc.org>) also has been active in providing innovative ways to protect important public lands.

The Sierra Club (<http://www.sierra-club.org>) has had a longstanding interest in parks, wilderness, and natural resource issues. The Wilderness Society (<http://www.wilderness.org>) has an equally long history and a special interest in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The National Audubon Society (<http://www.audubon.org>) and the National Wildlife Federation (<http://www.nwf.org>) also have a strong interest in land issues, particularly those dealing with

wildlife conservation and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Many businesses have an active interest in outdoor recreation activities. One way to access many of these groups is through the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America (<http://www.orca.org>).

Other groups with an interest in public lands include the Land Trust Alliance (<http://www.lta.org>), National Park Foundation (<http://www.nationalparks.org>), Ducks Unlimited (<http://www.ducks.org>), Friends of the Earth (<http://www.foe.org>), Natural Resources Defense Council (<http://www.nrdc.org>), and the Public Lands Foundation (<http://www.publicland.org>).

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