



SUBJECT: Rapid Ecoregional Assessments Provide Broad-Scale Management Information

SUMMARY: The BLM is working to develop a systematic, landscape-scale management approach that will facilitate examination of resource values, trends, and management opportunities from a broader perspective than individual field offices. The REAs are the initial step in the landscape approach and have progressed further than the other steps.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently released the Colorado Plateau, the Sonoran Desert, the Mojave Basin and Range, and the Central Basin and Range Rapid Ecoregional Assessments (REAs) and is planning to release 3 additional REAs this year (Northwestern Great Plains, Middle Rockies, and Seward Peninsula). An additional 8 REAs have been initiated and will be released over the next several years (Northern Basin, Wyoming Basins and Yukon Kuskokwim initiated 2011; North Slope, Madrean Archipelago, Chihuahuan, and Southern Great Plains initiated 2012; and the Central Yukon-Ray Mountains initiated 2013). This year the BLM also initiated a streamlined assessment, with a limited portfolio of management questions and conservation elements, in the San Luis Valley/Taos Plateau ecoregion in Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. Taken together, these assessments cover over 800 million acres of public and non-public lands in the United States.

The REAs synthesize existing information about resource conditions and trends within an ecoregion. They highlight and map areas of high ecological value and gauge the potential risks from climate change, wildfires, invasive species, energy development, and urban growth. The REAs also map areas that have high energy development potential and relatively low ecological value. In addition, the REAs establish landscape-scale baseline ecological data to gauge the effect and effectiveness of future management actions.

REA information is proving helpful to the development of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan in California, the development of an offsite mitigation strategy for the Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone, and for the Greater Sage Grouse planning effort.

At the local level, the REAs will enhance the quality of land use planning and environmental analysis conducted by BLM field offices. The information, maps, and tools provided by the REAs will strengthen analyses of the potential cumulative effects of climate change and other environmental disturbances on important ecological values.

Representatives from state agencies are participating in the Assessment Management Teams established for each REA. And the development of the REAs is being closely coordinated with the work the Western Governors' Association (WGA) is doing to establish a Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool for wildlife habitat and corridors in the western states.

BACKGROUND: The BLM recognizes that the public lands are facing increasingly complex and widespread environmental challenges that transcend traditional management boundaries. These challenges include managing wildfire; controlling weeds and insect outbreaks; providing for energy development and urban growth; and addressing pervasive effects of climate change. The BLM is developing a landscape-scale management approach to better understand these challenges and support stewardship of the diverse natural resources of the public lands.

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For additional information about the REAs, please visit:
http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/Landscape_Approach.html

