

PART 6

PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND RESOURCE PROTECTION

Besides preserving and protecting natural and cultural resources, the BLM's stewardship role extends to protecting public health, safety, and property. The Bureau is responsible for maintaining facilities and infrastructure, reducing health and safety risks to employees and the public, and protecting public lands from illegal dumping of wastes, theft and destruction of Federal property, misuse of resources, and wildland fires.

Table 6-1 summarizes the numbers of wildland fires and acres burned on BLM lands and lands protected by BLM through cooperative agreements with local fire protection agencies. The 2002 fire season was the second largest in 50 years. It will be remembered for its large timber fires. Colorado, Arizona, and Oregon recorded their largest fires in the last century. Aircraft accidents led to the grounding of some large air tankers. Nevertheless, firefighters were successful in suppressing 99 percent of all fires during the initial attack. Firefighters were also successful in protecting 98 percent of all threatened structures in the wildland/urban interface. While hundreds of communities were evacuated, thousands of residents forced from their homes, and more than 100,000 structures threatened by large fires, firefighters are credited with protecting homes, businesses, recreational structures, and other outbuildings.

In the Southwest, the spring fire danger was significantly elevated due to a multi-year drought and one of the driest winters on record. Large fires broke out when the usually windy spring was accompanied by below-normal precipitation. The Rocky Mountain fire season began a month early due to persistent drought conditions and a spring snow pack of only 20 to 40 percent of normal. As a result, high-elevation fires started early and burned until the onset of westward moving fronts in mid-summer and monsoon rains. Gusty winds caused two large fires in Oregon to merge and become the largest fire in the country this year, burning 500,000 acres.

The National Interagency Coordination Center set a new record for the number of days at Preparedness Level 5 – a total of 59 days. The previous record was set in 1994, when the national preparedness level was at 5 for 46 days.

Table 6-2 identifies the major types of capital investments on public lands. Roads, trails, recreation sites, and other improvements give the public access to public lands. Condition assessments are performed to determine the fitness of an asset as evaluated against the maintenance level established by management. In 2002, the BLM began determining an asset's current replacement value as part of the condition assessment process. Knowing the replacement value allows the BLM to use the industry standard Facilities Condition Index (FCI) as a method of measuring the condition and change of condition of facilities. FCI is the ratio of accumulated deferred maintenance to the current replacement value ($FCI = \text{Deferred Maintenance} / \text{Current Replacement Value}$). It is an indicator of the depleted value of constructed assets. The general rule is that FCI should be below 5 for a facility to be considered in good condition.

This is the first year that capital improvements are shown for Eastern States. The BLM's Eastern States acquired 800 acres on the Mason Neck peninsula in northern Virginia; the new Meadowood Farm administrative site is approximately 18 miles south of Washington, D.C. This property will be managed in harmony with surrounding land use and community interests and provide open space for recreation, environmental education, and wild horse and burro interpretation. The more recent Lower Potomac River

Project encompasses two tracts – Douglas Point and Maryland Point – in southern Maryland. Douglas Point, which encompasses 1,270 acres along the lower Potomac River acquired jointly by the BLM and the State of Maryland, contains magnificent hardwood forests and offers outstanding potential for recreation, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources. Maryland Point, consisting of 23 acres of waterfront four miles south of Douglas Point, was previously occupied by the Naval Research Laboratory.

Table 6-3 summarizes releases of hazardous substances and other pollutants and contaminants discovered on public lands. Historically, approximately 60 percent of all hazardous substance releases on public lands have been related to authorized commercial uses, mainly landfills, mines and mill sites, airstrips, and oil and gas sites. The other 40 percent have been caused by illegal activities, such as midnight dumping of agricultural and industrial wastes, wire burning, and illicit drug production. In recent years, about 90 percent of the hazardous substance releases found on public lands have been illegal dumping incidents involving debris or drums of biomedical, chemical, and petroleum wastes; pesticides; paints; batteries; asbestos; and illicit drug labs. The number of discarded methamphetamine drug labs increased substantially over last year. Moreover, these highly toxic and explosive wastes were found far afield of the usual locations and in regions not previously plagued by this problem, such as the Idaho panhandle and Montana. The remaining 10 percent of the hazardous substances releases had to do with fuel spills, mining wastes, and military accidents.