

“American Frontiers: A Public Lands Journey”

Background

In January 2001, an Information Bulletin (IB-2001-054, January 29, 2001) was issued which provided a basic overview of the *American Frontiers* project as it was envisioned at the time. Since January 2001, the program has expanded significantly as a result of a strong partnership developed with the National Geographic Society. The Public Lands Interpretive Association's *American Frontiers* project and the National Geographic Society's *Geography Action! 2002* program will combine forces to focus national attention on our public land estate through the creation of a series of educational projects and a public lands trek. This new combined program is entitled *America's Backyard: Exploring Your Public Lands*, and has as its mission to educate all Americans about the roles, values, and relevancy of public lands.

This national partnership program is continuing to grow and expand and now in addition to National Geographic Society and the Public Lands Interpretive Association (PLIA), includes the Department of the Interior, USFS, BLM, NPS, USFWS, BOR, COE, and numerous public land related organizations. The *America's Backyard* program continues its focus on public lands and promises to deliver many benefits to the BLM through its multi-faceted education and awareness campaign.

Briefings have been held with the BLM Director and with key individuals in the Department of the Interior in addition to key individuals in the USFS, NPS, and the other federal land managing agencies. A national Memorandum of Understanding between BLM and PLIA is in progress. Coordination meetings with affected BLM, Forest Service field offices, and NPS units relating to the trek portion of the event, occurred over the past summer and fall and are continuing as the project enters the permitting phase.

Because the project deals with all aspects of multiple use management on the public lands, and because the project does not promote any one land use or philosophy, support for the project is broad. In addition to the federal land managing agencies, numerous public lands related groups and organizations have offered their support for the project, which will enhance the projects educational outreach potential.

Project Update

The *America's Backyard* program is progressing at a rapid pace. National Geographic Society and Public Lands Interpretive Association are presently working on the *Geography Action! 2002* Web based educational component scheduled to go on line May 1, 2002. The planning for the associated educator training for the formal delivery of the *Geography Action! 2002* program is also underway. This training involves classroom sessions for educators held in May at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, VA. and satellite downlink training for educators from NCTC to locations all around the country in early August, maximizing opportunities for teacher and agency involvement.

Planning for the *American Frontiers: A Public Lands Journey* (the trek) element is in its final stages. The route has been selected and the agency permitting processes are beginning. The states directly affected include New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. The BLM permitting will be coordinated at the WO level and will involve those field offices affected along the trek route. Because the trek involves low impact potential and less than 20 individuals on each team, the requirements and workload associated with the permits should be minimal. The day-by-day trek itinerary is attached (see Attachment 2).

The trek team selection process is underway with team selection for the trek and support teams planned for mid-May. The trek team will be selected through an open nomination process and will be made up of a cross-section of Americans. In addition, National Geographic will be selecting two teachers, one for each team, to serve as “Teacher Guides” for the trek related educational elements. It is hoped that the makeup for the support team will include many agency personnel along with American Frontier’s staff, volunteers, and trek team alternates. Formal training for all teams is scheduled for mid July.

The trek is scheduled to begin July 31 and end September 28th, National Public Lands Day. Each of the two teams will be composed of 4 trekkers and 2 National Geographic film crew. 9 support team members will support the trekkers. Each support team will utilize 6 vehicles (2 trucks, 3 SUV’s, and 1 headquarters motor home), along with the variety of vehicles used by the trekkers (ATV’s, SUV’s, bicycles, motorboats, etc.).

There are many opportunities for special events to be held along the trek route. Some of these special events can be related to trek themes such as recreation, energy development, fire, grazing, wilderness, etc., others may be developed to showcase special partnerships, programs, and success stories such as the “WOW” program (Wonderful Outdoor World) and BLM’s wild horse and burro program. These events can be sponsored by federal agencies and/or outside groups and organizations. Field Offices are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities.

The trek will be recorded and documented by a National Geographic film crew and possibly a documentary film crew (if funded). Industry sponsors may also do some on-site filming for trek related promotional purposes. Trekkers will also record the trek through personal journals.

Agency Involvement

The Director of BLM and many levels within the Department of Interior are committed to providing support to the *America’s Backyard* program, especially the trek element. The trek offers many opportunities to BLM. These support opportunities involve pre-trek planning and coordination, on-trek logistical support, and opportunities to become involved in local special events. Planning and logistical support could include personnel details, equipment loans, and support services. These specific needs are outlined in Attachment 3, and summarized below.

En-route Education and Special Events

Local BLM field offices will have several opportunities to showcase special projects, partnerships, and programs involving local agencies and organizations as well as host and/or participate in one of the many educational outreach programs related to *America's Backyard* that can be presented in local schools and education facilities along the trek route. Although BLM is encouraged to take advantage of these many opportunities, there is no requirement to sponsor or become involved in any of these events. Participation is at the discretion of the local field offices. If a field office is interested in sponsoring a special event or becoming involved in local education outreach activities, the deadline for applying is April 30, 2002. (Attachment 4)

Personnel Details

There are many opportunities for BLM personnel to become involved in the trek portion of the project. These opportunities are available in the form of personnel details. These details range anywhere from two to twelve weeks. Some details may involve extended travel while others can be accomplished at home offices. Most of the travel related expenses to support the longer-term on-trek logistical support details will be covered within the trek budget; however, field offices may need to provide funds to detailees for travel to and from the detail location. All applications for details must be submitted no later than April 30, 2002. (Attachment 4)

Equipment

Another opportunity for BLM to support this project involves the loaning of certain equipment to the Public Lands Interpretive Association during the 10 weeks of the trek to reduce some of the budget pressures. Needs include 4x4 vehicles, trailers, lap top computers, hand held radios, etc. In some cases, equipment could accompany detailed employees. Please identify any opportunity for equipment loan on the application form. (Attachment 4)

Services

Specific services will also be needed prior to and during the trek. These services include such things as mapping support, writing, interpretive design services, PR and media support, law enforcement and security, and emergency medical technician (EMT) services. The specific needs are identified on the application form. (Attachment 4)

Application Process

Offices interested in sponsoring special events, participating in local education outreach programs, providing equipment and services support, or employees interested in details should submit the attached application form no later than April 30, 2002. Applications require approval of immediate supervisors and field office managers (see form). Completed forms should be mailed to:

David Mensing,
6501 4th St. NW, Suite I
Albuquerque, NM 87107

Or faxed to:
Dave Mensing
Fax 505-344-1543.

Applications and offers for assistance will be screened, with individuals and offices notified of selection by May 15, 2002

The Director and the Department support BLM participation in *America's Backyard* and the *American Frontiers*' trek. The goals and objectives of this project are in line with BLM and Departmental goals for conservation education, awareness, community involvement, and volunteerism on the public lands. The project provides an excellent opportunity for BLM offices and employees who have the interest, specific resources, skills, and qualifications to become a part of this outstanding national initiative.