



Rangeland Health and the BLM Grazing Program

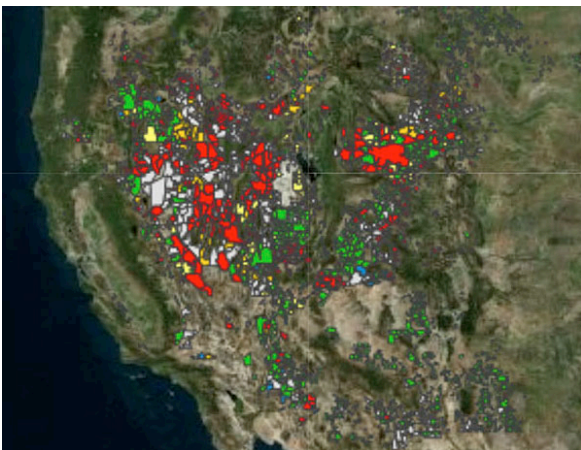
Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees over 245 million acres of public land, which is more than any other federal agency. BLM balances the competing interests of conservation, energy development, recreation, ecosystem health and livestock production. 155 million acres of the land managed by BLM are leased grazing allotments of varying size.

Rangeland health – or Land Health Standards - refers to the quality and sustainability of waterways, habitats, soil, flora and fauna on the range (43 CFR §§ 4180.1, 4180.2). Many factors impact rangeland health including off-road vehicles, drought, the spread of invasive species, and fire. However, BLM identifies livestock grazing as the most frequently cited cause of range failure.

Mapping the Range

Through multiple public record requests, PEER gathered the agency's rangeland health data from each state and field office. PEER plotted the data from 21,000 allotments on one interactive map and created a visual compilation of BLM's data.



Visit peer.org/mapping-the-range

2024 Findings

- BLM has assessed Land Health Standards (LHS) on approximately 114 million acres of grazed public lands. They have yet to assess nearly 36 million acres.
- Of the total acres assessed, 50% (57 million acres) fail to meet LHS, an area approximately the size of the state of Illinois.
- Of the 50% of the lands that failed to meet LHS, the agency said that livestock overgrazing is a significant reason for failure in 33% of cases or approximately 38 million acres.
- There are significant disparities across states, with states like Nevada showing high failure rates largely due to livestock, while New Mexico and Montana exhibit much lower failure rates.
- In Wyoming, a massive allotment of over 950,000 public acres is failing to meet LHS. BLM reports livestock overgrazing as a significant cause.
- Records reveal that many allotments have never been assessed, including a 1.4-million-acre allotment in Nevada.
- Wild horses are cited as "a significant disturbance factor" in only 77 allotments (less than 1%), and 60 times in conjunction with livestock.
- A significant portion of the assessed lands that are "meeting" standards are actually only "making significant progress" towards meeting the standards, not actually meeting them.
- Since PEER last analyzed the data in 2020 there has been a notable increase in the number of allotments that BLM classified as failing, but without an identified cause. This suggests a need for better data collection and improved assessment techniques.

2024 BLM Allotment Statistics (1997-2023 BLM data from FOIA requests)

STATUS	Public land acres	Percent of all allotments by acreage	Percent of all assessed allotments
ALL STANDARDS MET	57,820,276	38%	50%
NOT MET - LIVESTOCK OVERGRAZING	37,885,522	25%	33%
NOT MET - CAUSE NOT IDENTIFIED	6,966,846	5%	6%
NOT MET - OTHER	11,899,530	8%	10%
UNASSESSED	36,580,713	24%	
OTHER	1,200,667	1%	
TOTAL ACREAGE OF LIVESTOCK ALLLOTMENTS	152,353,554*	100%	
TOTAL ASSESSED LAND	114,572,174		100%
TOTAL FAILING LAND	56,751,898		50%

*Total acreage does not equal 155 million acres because private lands within public land allotments are not counted and there is a 2.6% data gap in allotment records.

Range Recommendations

Bureau of Land Management should:

1. Create a central BLM geodatabase containing rangeland health evaluation records. Combine and coordinate all agency databases so that it puts all the data to work and can use all available data in decision making. BLM and the public need real time access to improve management effectiveness.
2. Complete and update Land Health Standards evaluations. Currently, many allotments lack recent evaluations, with some data being outdated by twenty years.
3. Commit to utilizing the data to make land use decisions. For instance, if overgrazing has been identified as a cause for failure, BLM can reduce livestock numbers or adjust the season of use. Similarly, if the cause of failure is off-road vehicles, the agency can restrict permits.
4. Analyze broader trends to identify discrepancies in allotment management across different regions. For example, BLM has identified more than 40% of the lands in Idaho, Nevada and Wyoming as failing to meet Land Health Standards, compared to just 2% in New Mexico.
5. Focus on reviewing and managing allotments located within Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wilderness Study Areas, Wilderness and Monuments. It is crucial to preserve the historical, cultural and scenic values of these special lands and to protect fish, wildlife and other natural resources.



View the full report at: peer.org/rangeland-health-trends

BLM Underfunded and Understaffed

BLM is grappling with severe underfunding and staffing shortages. The agency is tasked with the complex management of lands for multiple uses while facing growing demands due to an increase in land management responsibilities and a surge in visitation and recreational use. Yet BLM has been consistently expected to achieve more with fewer resources. Between 2003 and 2020, BLM's workforce was reduced by about 20%, maintaining a staff level of around 10,000 from 2020 to 2022. This is in stark contrast to the National Park Service, which employs 25 staff members per 100,000 acres, compared to BLM's four. To enhance its capability to manage lands effectively, BLM needs to urgently address these staffing deficits and prioritize job quality improvements.

Contact Us

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