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Protection & Management of Riparian-Wetland Areas

Riparian-Wetland Areas

Riparian (streamside)-wetland areas are among the most valuable habitats in the United States. These areas are adjacent to, and dependent on, the presence of water. The condition of these areas is a growing concern among environmentally-conscious Americans. That concern is shared by the U.S. Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which administers about 270 million acres of public lands — of which riparian-wetland ecosystems account for 23.2 million acres, or about 8.5 percent.

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Riparian-Wetland Initiative for the 1990's

To protect these economically and environmentally valuable areas, the BLM in 1991 launched a program called the *Riparian-Wetland Initiative of the 1990's*. This program sets goals and strategies for the agency in its efforts to upgrade the ecological condition of riparian-wetland areas. The principal objective of the initiative is to get at least 75 percent of these areas into what the BLM calls "proper functioning condition" by 1997. The agency has been working toward this goal through a variety of land management practices.

associated damage; (3) reducing stream channel and streambank erosion; (4) increasing available water and stream flow duration by holding water in stream banks and aquifers; (5) supporting a diversity of plant and wildlife species; (6) maintaining habitat for healthy fish populations; (7) providing water, forage, and shade for wildlife and livestock; and (8) creating opportunities for recreationists to fish, camp, picnic and enjoy other activities.

Proper Functioning Condition

Riparian-wetland areas are functioning properly when they exhibit healthy characteristics, such as (1) purifying water by removing sediments and other contaminants; (2) reducing the risk of flooding and

Four Major Goals

The Riparian-Wetland Initiative sets four major goals for the BLM. They are: (1) To restore and maintain riparian-wetland areas so that at least 75 percent are in proper functioning condition by 1997. The overall objective is to improve the ecological status of these areas.

(2) To protect riparian-wetland areas and associated uplands through

proper land management and by avoiding or mitigating negative impacts. The purpose is to protect, acquire and expand key areas so the BLM can manage them more effectively and efficiently.

(3) To carry out a riparian-wetland information and outreach program that includes training and research.

The purpose is to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of healthy riparian-wetland areas.

League), the BLM has been making progress toward each of those four goals. For example, the BLM:

- Has made changes in livestock management practices in order to restore riparian health.
- Has developed and maintained riparian-wetland improvement projects. These projects include water development (to disperse animal concentration over larger areas), fence construction (to control livestock), and plantings of trees, shrubs and grass.
- Has mitigated the impact of hundreds of surface-disturbing activities, such as road building, pipeline construction, mineral exploration or development and recreation activities.

(4) To maintain existing and form new public-private partnerships. The purpose is to supplement and accelerate the agency's work by drawing on the talents of volunteers and using non-Federal funds.

In cooperation with public land users (such as ranchers and mining companies) and conservation groups (such as Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy and the Izaak Walton

- Has conducted training, public outreach and research efforts to promote understanding of the function of riparian-wetland ecosystems.

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- Has undertaken high-priority riparian-wetland restoration projects through partnerships with public land users and conservation groups.

Although the BLM has taken great strides toward the goals of the *Riparian-Wetland Initiative of the 1990's*, the agency knows that much more remains to be done. More riparian-wetland projects must be undertaken; more maintenance work on projects is needed; more grazing allotment management plans need to be revised; and more scientific data must be gathered and analyzed in order for the BLM to better manage and restore riparian-wetland areas.

Meeting the goals of the Riparian-Wetland Initiative will require a major commitment from Congress, the BLM's work force and the agency's partners. With that cooperative effort, the BLM can achieve healthy conditions on riparian-wetland areas throughout the West.

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240