

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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### **Secretary of Interior Issues Record of Decision on New Mexico Land Health Standards**

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt today approved new standards and guidelines to ensure the health of rangelands in New Mexico managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). By approving these measures, the Secretary fulfills his commitment to enhancing the long-term health of Western public rangelands.

“The Secretary’s approval of rangeland health standards and grazing guidelines will enable BLM-New Mexico to carry out more effectively its multiple-use mission in the State,” said Sylvia Baca, Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals. “With these measures in place, we can maintain healthy conditions that will allow for sustained use of public rangeland resources.”

The Secretary’s Record of Decision (ROD) acts on recommendations of the BLM’s New Mexico Resource Advisory Council (RAC)—which advises the BLM on public land grazing in New Mexico—and previous findings in an environmental impact statement released in January 2000.

The ROD is largely unchanged from a version issued last year by the BLM’s New Mexico State Director, based on the recommendation from the BLM’s New Mexico RAC. In his decision, which reflects the findings of a related Environmental Impact Statement issued in January 2000, Babbitt approved three of the RAC’s four recommended standards and five of its seven proposed guidelines. The only modifications that the Secretary made are as follows:

- Set aside the “Sustainable Communities and Human Dimension Standard”—and its accompanying guideline—that did not conform to regulatory requirements;
- Restricted the use of non-native plant species to rehabilitate disturbed rangeland, which meets minimal regulatory requirements; and
- Provided for implementation of these measures based on best available data.

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“These standards and guidelines will enhance our agency’s protection of New Mexico’s public rangelands,” said Michelle Chavez, the BLM’s New Mexico State Director. “It’s been a rewarding experience working with representatives of different interests to put these measures in place so grazing can continue while we protect vital land and water resources. We’ll continue to work with permittees and lessees, involved landowners, Tribes, and other members of the public as we implement these standards and guidelines.”

The BLM, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, manages more land—264 million surface acres—than any other Federal agency. Most of this public land is located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The New Mexico State Office of the BLM is responsible for managing land and minerals in New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas. In New Mexico, the BLM manages 13.4 million acres of public land. It also administers 2,100 acres of surface land in Oklahoma and 11,800 acres of land in Texas. In addition, BLM manages 43.5 million subsurface acres of Federally owned minerals in New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas. As part of its trust responsibility, the BLM oversees mining operations on Tribal lands, which amounts to 9.4 million acres of land in New Mexico and Oklahoma. The BLM preserves open space by managing the public lands for multiple uses, including outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, and mining, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources found on the public lands.

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