

For Immediate Release

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**BLM Director Offers Public Lands in Support of President Bush's Initiative
to Promote Improved Health Through Visiting Public Lands**

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director Kathleen Clarke offered her support of President Bush's new Healthier US Initiative, announced June 12, to promote improved health through the benefits of physical activity and the stress reducing experiences that visiting Federal public lands provide. As part of the President's Comprehensive Fitness Agenda, the Initiative will include an entrance fee-free weekend on June 22-23, 2002, to public lands sites across the country.

"I am very excited about the President and Interior Secretary Norton inviting all of America to come out and visit the magnificent natural and cultural resources throughout our country," said Director Clarke. "Physical fitness plays a role in the health and well-being of all Americans, and what better way to renew both the mind and body than by visiting America's special places and natural treasures. The entrance fee-free weekend will be a wonderful opportunity for our visitors to experience their public lands, exercise their minds and bodies, while uplifting their spirits."

Currently, the BLM has more than 20 million acres of land that is available to the public for recreation. These acres include National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas, and miles of Historic and Scenic trails. The BLM manages these lands in accordance with the Federal Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), which provides for the multiple use of public lands, including recreation. Last year alone, more than 62 million people visited BLM lands. These visitors participated in activities such as: boating, camping, picnicking, scenic driving, fishing, hunting, swimming, rafting, off-highway travel, interpretation, and educational activities.

“This is a time unlike any other in our history, and many people are in need of outlets to release the stress and tension that affect so many Americans,” said Director Clarke. “The public lands, including our ‘Jewels of the West,’ provide nurturing for the soul and the beauty and solitude of a natural art museum. We are proud to manage places where a person can experience both peace and reinvigoration.”

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All BLM entrance fees, including commercial tour entrance fees, will be waived for the two days of the fee-free weekend. The BLM's entrance fee sites are: Anasazi Heritage Center, Colorado; Milner Historic Recreation Area, Idaho; Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, Nevada; National Historic Oregon Trail Visitor Center, Oregon; Yaquina Head Outstanding Natural Area, Oregon; and Wildwood Recreation Area, Oregon. The fee waiver extends to day use or services fees, except for sites that require a reservation and does not include fees under BLM's Special Recreation Permit authority or overnight camping fees.

The BLM also works to achieve an outdoor recreation network, through partnerships, with state and local communities to provide opportunities for physical fitness in urban settings beyond public land boundaries. The Wonderful Outdoor World (WOW) program, managed by the BLM's Eastern States Office in Springfield, Va., is one example of how the BLM provides opportunities for youth to learn about and participate in environmental stewardship through community camp outs and special activities and events. The program, now in its third year, has reached more than 5,000 8-12-year-olds in the Washington, D.C. area.

The BLM, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, manages more land—262 million surface acres—than any other Federal agency. Most of the country's BLM-managed public land is located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. These lands, once remote, now provide the growing communities of the West with open space that gives the region much of its character. The Bureau, which has a budget of \$1.8 billion and a workforce of 10,000 employees, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the Nation. The BLM's "multiple use" mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The BLM accomplishes this by managing for such resources as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, and energy and mineral development that helps meet the nation's energy needs, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on the public lands.