

**House Report 104-625 - DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES
APPROPRIATIONS BILL, 1997**

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the multiple use management, protection, and development of a full range of natural resources, including minerals, timber, rangeland, fish and wildlife habitat, and wilderness on about 270 million acres of the Nation's public lands and for management of 300 million additional acres of federally owned subsurface mineral rights. The Bureau is the second largest supplier of public outdoor recreation in the Western United States, with an estimated 65 million visits totaling 570 million visitor hours of recreation use on the public lands under the Bureau's management.

Under the multiple-use and ecosystem management concept the Bureau administers the grazing of approximately 4.3 million head of livestock on some 164 million acres of public land ranges, and manages over 43,000 wild horses and burros, some 270 million acres of wildlife habitat, and over 150,000 miles of fisheries habitat. Grazing receipts are estimated to be about \$15.5 million in fiscal year 1997, compared to an estimated \$15.6 million in fiscal year 1996 and actual receipts of \$16.8 million in fiscal year 1995. The Bureau also administers about 4 million acres of commercial forest lands through the 'Management of lands and resources' and 'Oregon and California grant lands' appropriations. Timber receipts (including salvage) are estimated to be \$96.9 million in fiscal year 1997 compared to estimated receipts of \$96.2 million in fiscal year 1996 and actual receipts of \$74.4 million in fiscal year 1995. The Bureau has an active program of soil and watershed management on 175 million acres in the lower 48 States and 92 million acres in Alaska. Practices such as revegetation, protective fencing, and water developments are designed to conserve, enhance, and develop public land, soil, and watershed resources. The Bureau is also responsible for fire protection on the public lands and on all Department of the Interior managed lands in Alaska, and for the suppression of wildfires on the public lands in Alaska and the western States.

MANAGEMENT OF LANDS AND RESOURCES

Appropriation enacted, 1996	\$567,453,000
Budget estimate, 1997	575,892,000
Recommended, 1997	566,514,000
Comparison:	
Appropriation, 1996	-939,000
Budget estimate, 1997	-9,378,000

The Committee recommends an appropriation of \$566,514,000 for management of lands and resources, a decrease of \$9,378,000 below the budget estimate, and \$939,000 below the 1996 enacted level.

The amount recommended by the Committee as compared to the 1996 enacted level by activity is shown on the following table:

Offset Folios 9 to 10 Insert Here

Land resources.--The Committee recommends \$120,435,000 for land resources, including increases from the 1996 enacted level of \$1,591,000 for soil, water and air management, \$2,269,000 for range management, \$30,000 for forestry management, \$1,578,000 for riparian management, \$1,059,000 for cultural resources, and \$1,080,000 for wild horse and burro management. The Committee supports the Bureau's involvement in the PM-10 Clean Air study in the San Joaquin Valley. The Committee encourages the Bureau to use up to \$500,000 of funds within range management for the Rangelands Ecosystem Group component of the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program (EMAP) in cooperation with other agencies. The Committee notes that the Secretary will soon be implementing new standards and guidelines for rangeland health developed by the Resource Advisory Councils. However to assess fully the condition of western rangelands, the Bureau must use new data collection tools, such as remote sensing, to prioritize its field work.

Wildlife and fisheries.--The Committee recommends \$28,234,000 for wildlife and fisheries, including increases of \$1,601,000 for wildlife management and \$1,533,000 for fisheries management above the 1996 enacted level.

Recreation management.--The Committee recommends \$45,864,000 for recreation management, including increases of \$1,072,000 for wilderness management, and \$1,633,000 for recreation resources management above the 1996 enacted level.

The Committee believes that as a result of the 69 BLM wilderness areas totaling 3.6 million acres created under P.L. 103-433, the Department should increase its BLM desert ranger force in the California desert. The concentration of visitor use has resulted in a number of adverse impacts including more conflicts among users, greater pressure on resources, and a greater need for intensive management and visitor assistance. For these reasons, the Committee believes that the best approach for resolving this problem is to provide an additional \$200,000 in order to fund five additional rangers.-

The Committee directs that \$100,000 be used at the visitor facility at Harper Lake for the installation of interpretive signs, hiking trails, and boardwalks to help make this area an environmental showplace to enhance tourism, and help create an outdoor facility for use by local young people.

Energy and minerals.--The Committee recommends \$69,503,000 for energy and minerals, which is an increase of \$342,000 above the 1996 enacted level.

The Committee is greatly concerned about the soda ash royalty rate increase recently imposed by the Department of the Interior. It has come to the Committee's attention that the Department may not have provided adequate support and analysis for this increase. Therefore, the Committee directs the Department to conduct a study in consultation with the Department of Commerce, the United States Trade Representative, and the Office of Management and Budget, that at a minimum addresses (1) what is the best way to set royalty rates when 'comparable' rates are the product of monopoly power, (2) what are the benefits associated with increased revenues to the Treasury, as opposed to the costs to the domestic soda ash industry and U.S. trade objectives, and (3) why is the royalty rate for soda ash significantly higher than the rates charged for other minerals. The Department should submit this report to the Committee no later than 120 days after enactment of this Act. If adequate analysis of this issue is not forthcoming, the Congress may give serious consideration to repealing this royalty rate increase.

The Committee supports the discussions currently taking place between the Bureau and the States over the transfer of Federal oil and gas inspection and enforcement activities to the States. The Committee believes that it is in everyone's interest to pursue a policy that can lead to reduced costs as well as simplification and consolidation of regulatory programs. The Bureau is directed to report to the Committee on the status of these negotiations within 90 days of enactment of this Act.

Realty and ownership management.--The Committee recommends \$69,556,000 for realty and

ownership management, which is \$189,000 above the fiscal year 1996 enacted level.

Resource protection and maintenance.--The Committee recommends \$58,084,000 for resource protection and maintenance, which includes increases of \$2,654,000 for facilities maintenance, \$53,000 for resource protection, and \$76,000 for hazardous materials management above the fiscal year 1996 enacted level.

The Committee recommends a reduction of \$8,500,000 for resource management planning which eliminates this subactivity. It is the Committee's expectation that the necessary costs of planning will be borne by the programs (which already cover the majority of planning costs), and that funding in this manner will encourage additional streamlining of the planning process. Savings will also be achieved by eliminating the layer of planning staff who have been funded in this subactivity. Funding has been reallocated to program areas to ensure that additional resources are dedicated to on-the-ground field work.

Automated land and mineral records system.--The Committee recommends \$42,207,000 for automated land and mineral records system (ALMRS), which is \$8,793,000 below the fiscal year 1996 enacted level. Any additional funding for this activity is contingent upon a successful initial test in New Mexico, and a third party review of the results of this test.

Mining law administration.--The Committee recommends \$32,300,000 for mining law administration, which is the same as the request. This activity is supported by offsetting fees equal to the amount made available in the bill.

In Title III--General Provisions, the Committee has continued a limitation on accepting and processing applications for patents and on the patenting of Federal land to claimants until mining law reform legislation is enacted. This language is identical to that carried in 1996.

Workforce and organizational support.--The Committee recommends \$116,131,000 for workforce and organizational support, \$574,000 above the 1996 enacted level.

Bill language- The Committee has included bill language that permits the collection and use of small fees by the Bureau to cover part of the costs of processing applications and for providing certain services on the public lands. The intent of this language is to use these fees to help address the backlog of operation and maintenance needs on our public lands. This language does not apply to the collection or distribution of receipts from rents, royalties or bonuses from energy and mineral leasing, timber sales, or grazing fees. It also does not affect collections that are already appropriated to the Bureau, such as adoption fees for wild horses and burros, right-of-way application fees, and fees for providing copies of public land records. The Committee directs the Bureau to provide, as part of its annual budget submission, a list of fees established under this authority, the fee rate charged, and the distribution of these fees to program operations.