



Written by [David Kelly](#) on May 3, 2023

Proposed “Conservation” Rule Will Further Restrict Public Access to Federal Lands

Since its inception in 1849, the Department of the Interior ([DOI](#)) has grown into a vast government bureaucracy controlling 11 agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which [claims](#) that it “manages one in every 10 acres of land in the United States, and approximately 30 percent of the Nation’s minerals.”

The BLM manages use and activities taking place on lands stretching across the nation, from the Arctic Ocean to the border with Mexico, and from the San Juan Islands of Washington state to Key West, Florida. The bureau maintains control over the nation’s energy, minerals, timber, and grazing lands, and controls access to public lands for outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and skiing.



Sarah Ewalt Photography/iStock/Getty Images Plus

For decades the BLM has used the policies under the Federal Land Policy & Management Act of 1976 ([FLPMA](#)) to guide their day-to-day operations. In March, a [proposed rule](#) change to the FLPMA, driven by President Biden’s environmental justice agenda, was submitted to the *Federal Register* that would assist the BLM in managing “public lands for multiple use and sustained yield by prioritizing the health and resilience of ecosystems across those lands.”

The rule change was challenged by Senator John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) during a May 2 review by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources (ENR) of DOI’s \$18.9 billion fiscal year 2024 (FY24) budget request. DOI Secretary Deb Haaland was in attendance to [testify](#) and lobby for a 12-percent increase over the 2023 enacted budget.

In published [remarks](#), Sen. Barrasso said the DOI’s proposed rule allows “entities to lease federal lands for the purpose — not of use, but of non-use.”

Barrasso continued:

In other words, the Secretary wants to make non-use a use. She is calling up - down, day - night, black - white - turning federal law on its head. The Secretary is giving radicals a new tool to shut out the public. Remember, environmental radicals don’t want the public to have access to public lands.

With about half of the land in Wyoming owned by the federal government, Barrasso [argued](#), “families and communities in Wyoming and throughout the West depend on access to public lands for grazing, for forest management, for recreation. The Secretary of Interior is aggressively working to take that access away from the public.”



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The Epoch Times [reported](#):

According to the BLM's proposal published in the Federal Register, the rule change would apply "land health standards" to public lands and "clarify the term 'conservation' as an equal land use to others within the ... multiple-use doctrine."

The proposed new rule directs federal land managers "to identify and prioritize lands and waters through the land management process that require habitat restoration work, such as removing invasive species or restoring stream banks."

The proposed BLM rule would offer approved "conservation leases" of public land that would allow third-party organizations to restore natural habitats and ecological functions. Most conservation leases would be issued for a maximum of 10 years, which term would be extended if necessary to serve the purposes for which the lease was first issued.

"The purpose of the proposed rule is to promote the use of conservation to ensure that ecosystems on public lands can resist disturbance[,] maintain and regain their function following environmental stressors such as drought and wildfire," the BLM states in its proposed rule change.

According to [HuffPost](#), Haaland called the proposal a "smart path to ensure healthy landscapes, abundant wildlife habitat, clear water and balanced decision-making on our public lands."

HuffPost continued:

"For too long, land management planning has been dominated by extractive industries," she told reporters last month at the Society of Environmental Journalists' annual conference.

"This proposal is a long time coming and will go far to help address the growing pressures we're seeing on our public lands from fossil fuel development and the impacts of the climate crisis."

Recognizing that Haaland was more interested in pushing Biden's destructive green agenda policies through with the rule change versus a realistic approach to land management practices, Senator Steve Daines (R-Mont.) raised some questions during the hearing.

Per the [Times](#):

Daines expressed "significant concerns" that recognizing conservation as a land use would threaten "traditional Montana uses like ranching, mining, logging" on federal lands.

"Conservation is vital, but this proposal hinders conservation by rushing forward with ill-conceived, opaque, and vague plans," he said, asking Haaland if the rule will recognize the inherent conservation value in how ranchers use land.

"Grazing on federal lands provides billions of dollars in ecosystem management services, wildlife habitat, clean air, clean water," Daines said. "I'm concerned that you are trying to separate these uses from their, quote-unquote, 'conservation value.'"

Over 11,500 comments have already been submitted to the *Federal Register* on the proposed BLM "Conservation and Landscape Health" rule change. It is quite apparent that environmental-justice



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warriors are pushing hard for this rule to be implemented, as the majority of comments that this writer reviewed were in favor of the rules passage. The comment period ends on June 20.



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