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BLM's new 'Public Lands Rule' could increase access to outdoor recreation

Public meeting set for Thursday in Golden

News **NEWS** | May 24, 2023

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Vail Daily

The Bureau of Land Management will host a meeting on Thursday in Golden for members of the public to learn more about its proposed "Public Lands Rule," a new effort to recognize conservation as a leasable land use.

The meeting is one of three in-person opportunities for questions about the proposed rule, and the only in-person meeting scheduled to take place in Colorado. It's scheduled for 5 to 7 p.m. on Thursday at the Denver West Marriott in Golden. Two more similar meetings will take place in New Mexico and Nevada, and one more virtual meeting is scheduled for [June 5 on Zoom](#) for those who can't make it in person but want to have questions answered.

The BLM is [accepting comments](#) on the rule change through June 20.

The proposed Public Lands Rule, [which was announced in late March](#), establishes frameworks for interested parties to pursue [conservation leases](#) with the BLM, with restoration or mitigation as a stated goal of the land use outcome. A conservation land use would be placed "on an equal footing with other uses," [according to the BLM](#), in an effort to "help guide responsible development while safeguarding important places for the millions of people who visit public lands every year to hike, hunt, camp, fish and more."

In Eagle County, where hundreds of thousands of acres of land are managed by the BLM, outdoor recreation already has a strong presence. The BLM maintains the [Eagle River Extensive Recreation Management Area](#) for its "excellent recreational opportunities, especially for fishermen and boaters visiting the area," according to the agency.

But elsewhere, recreation struggles to compete with other land uses, including grazing and energy development. The new rule “will increase access to outdoor recreation by putting conservation on equal footing with other uses,” according to the BLM.

The new rule has been well received by outdoor recreation enthusiasts.



This map shows the boundaries of the Bureau of Land Management’s Colorado River Valley field area. Areas in yellow are BLM land. Areas in green are national forest, areas in turquoise are state land, and areas in white are private land.

Bureau of Land Management/Courtesy photo

“When used wisely, the Bureau of Land Management conservation mechanisms will support our local economies, tourism, and outdoor recreation as well as provide certainty for our rural and gateway communities so we can make long-term investments,” said Chaffee County Commissioner Keith Baker.

Aaron Kindle, the Salida-based director of sporting advocacy at the National Wildlife Federation, said the goal is not to eliminate any existing land use from BLM lands, rather it’s to give conservation a “legitimate seat at the table,” he said.

“BLM, over the years, has prioritized things like mining development and grazing over conservation values, and there’s a track record that shows that,” Kindle said. “Now we’re hoping that it just comes up to plane ... on par and considered equally with all other uses.”

Kindle said the BLM has a mandate to do so, something the BLM itself said in proposing the new rule, acknowledging that the new rule is “consistent with the BLM’s multiple use and sustained yield mission” [in a release](#).

“The proposal would help the BLM fulfill its mission, ensuring public lands and the resources they provide are available now and in the future,” [according to a statement issued by the BLM](#).

In introducing the proposal and comment period, both BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning and Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland mentioned outdoor recreation uses in their comments.

“As we welcome millions of visitors to hunt, fish and recreate on our public lands each year, now is the time to improve the health and management of special places,” [Haaland said](#).

“We want to hear from our permittees as well as the millions of visitors who hunt, fish and recreate on our public lands on how to keep them healthy and available for generations to come,” [Stone-Manning said](#).

But the BLM, in its comments, also recognizes the negative consequences recreation and people can have on the landscape. In noting a loss of wildlife, “public lands face growing pressure as recreation increases and development on private land disrupts habitat,” [the BLM noted](#).

In an example of how the new rule may be employed, the BLM used wildlife habitat protection as an example.

“A nonprofit organization could put people to work restoring mule deer or elk habitat and, through a conservation lease, be assured the work could take hold and flourish,” [the BLM wrote](#).

Citizens can leave comments by visiting [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov).

For more information on the BLM’s upcoming public question and answer sessions on the new rule, visit blm.gov/press-release/update-blm-releases-public-meeting-information-proposed-public-lands-rule

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