

H.R. 2016: National Landscape Conservation System Act (Grijalva, D-AZ)

Overview

The Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages 262 million surface acres and approximately 700 million acres of subsurface minerals, predominantly located in 11 contiguous western states and Alaska. Unlike the National Park Service (NPS), the BLM is tasked with a "multiple-use" mandate meaning that, while some BLM land is managed for conservation purposes, other BLM areas are managed for energy production, timber, grazing, public recreation, and other uses.

Between 1946 and 1996, large national monuments, designated on BLM land under the Antiquities Act, were removed from BLM management and included within the National Park System. In 2000, Former Interior Secretary Babbitt established within the BLM the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) as a framework to tie BLM's conservation units together into a larger conservation system, thus stopping the loss of conservation lands to the NPS.

The NLCS includes approximately 26 million acres, or about 10%, of the land administered by the BLM. The System encompasses more than 800 units, including all National Scenic and Historic Trails, National Conservation Areas, National Monuments, wilderness areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and wilderness study areas managed by the agency. Each NLCS unit was established by Congress or Presidential Proclamation and is managed according to its enabling authority, as well as the Wilderness Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act, or other laws applicable to specific units. The NLCS itself has not been established in statute, however.

H.R. 2016

H.R. 2016 establishes the NLCS in statute and lists the components of the system. The legislation makes clear that each NLCS unit is to be managed in accordance with all laws applicable to that unit and in "a manner that protects the values for which the components of the system were designated." The legislation includes an extensive savings clause making clear that nothing in the bill alters the underlying management authority governing the individual NLCS units.

The purpose of the bill is to grant the NLCS formal Congressional approval; hopefully raising the stature of the system and its components while also preventing a future Interior Secretary from abolishing the system administratively.

In addition to the support of the Bush Administration, this legislation enjoys broad support from a diverse coalition which includes environmental groups, the American Hiking Society, National Council of Churches, Boone and Crockett Club, National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Wildlife Federation, and the Outdoor Industry Association.