

About the Data

In 2010, BLM launched an ambitious regional ecological assessment program (Rapid Ecoregional Assessments or REAs) the objective of which was to document current status and forecast future vulnerability of resource conditions with respect to significant disturbance factors. Livestock grazing was identified by participating scientists in a number of ecoregions as a significant “change agent” or cause of a wide range of ecological and environmental impacts. BLM elected, however, to exclude livestock grazing from the assessments, citing litigation concerns and data availability. Participating scientists balked at the suggestion that livestock grazing be singled out for exclusion as a change agent, warning that to do so jeopardized the credibility of the assessments and their findings. The agency asserted that the agency’s Land Health Standards evaluation data was not available in a single dataset, nor readily converted to geospatial format. Neither proved true.

BLM continues work on the REAs without factoring in grazing despite a formal complaint charging violation of federal regulations pertaining to the integrity of scientific and scholarly activities, filed by PEER with the Department of the Interior. The Department subsequently passed the complaint on to BLM, which conducted its own investigation. The Agency dismissed the complaint, determining that the claim was without merit.

After filing the Scientific Integrity Complaint, PEER obtained both a 2008 version and a 2013 version of the LHS dataset from BLM via the Freedom of Information Act. Our objective was to place these data into the public domain as an accurate, up-to-date, and publically accessible LHS database to facilitate independent review and analysis, and to bring pressure to bear on the agency to increase the transparency of their rangeland health standards evaluation program.

The datasets received from the agency, however, were incomplete, inconsistent, and contained numerous errors and omissions. No metadata was included with the datasets. Most important, the categorical classifications BLM uses to summarize Land Health Standards evaluation status and causal determinations were not provided in these datasets, confounding attempts to make a direct comparison with the published annual summaries of Land Health Standards evaluations. Thus, before these datasets could be used for summary purposes or spatial analyses, more than 45,000 records required extensive review, interpretation and classification.

The dataset that forms the basis of this map is the result of PEER’s process of reconciling the BLM’s two raw datasets to arrive at a single, updated version containing the most current Land Health Standards evaluation, and a one-to-one relationship between multiple LHS evaluations associated with each allotment (based on an approach described in *Veblen et al.*, [USGS OFR 2011-1263](#)). The Land Health Status classification system was developed by Peter Lattin, who should be cited as the source of the derived Land Health Standards data displayed on this website. The BLM should be cited as the original data source of both the raw Land Health Standards data and the grazing allotment GIS layer in any products derived from these data.

Official records may be referenced at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) State offices and the BLM National Operations Center (NOC). The LHS data was derived from two datasets obtained by PEER from BLM by Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request: *FOIA 2007-64.RatnerCD.xlsm* and *Data responsive to FOIA 2012-0714 provided 0152013.xlsx*. These data reflect available LHS records through 2012.

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