

**BUILDING ACCOUNTABILITY:  
JUSTIFICATION FOR A NEW BUDGET STRUCTURE FOR THE  
NATIONAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION SYSTEM (NLCS)**

Created in 2000, the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) protects some of our last, great Western public lands. The System includes 26 million acres of National Monuments, Conservation Areas, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Historic Trails, and Wild and Scenic Rivers. These lands and waters are rich in archaeology, history, and wildlife. The landscapes range from deserts to mountains to canyons; all are places where Americans enjoy primitive recreation, hunting, and scientific and cultural discovery. The Bureau of Land Management is the System's steward.

A major obstacle to the protection of the NLCS is its obscure budget structure and presentation. Since 2002, the Department of the Interior's budget has failed to mention the National Landscape Conservation System. It is virtually impossible to determine from any readily-accessible public document how much annual funding the System receives, or how those monies are allocated among the System's lands and projects. Funds intended for the NLCS are hidden in and scattered throughout the BLM budget, instead of being clearly identified in BLM budget documents.

By contrast, the FY2002 Department of the Interior (DOI) budget included detailed a "cross cut" budget for the NLCS. The "cross cut" budget table clearly showed total funding budgeted for the System and for the National Monuments and other special "units" in the System. That budget presentation also clarified the kinds of activities that funds were supporting in the NLCS--for example, what amounts were directed to cultural resources management, recreation management, or protection of endangered species.

**We urge Congress to direct the BLM to develop and reinstate a cross-cut budget table for NLCS for the FY2006 Budget.** This table should show funding for the NLCS as well as all the individual sub-activities. A cross-cut table for the NLCS, presented in the budget, would:

- *Enable Congress to track annual spending on the NLCS.* Decision-makers could more efficiently determine where funding comes from, what percent of the BLM's budget is allocated to the NLCS, and track changes in funding over time.
- *Help Congress and conservation and historic preservation groups prevent degradation of the NLCS' special values.* The NLCS was established to protect our irreplaceable national heritage and prevent irreparable natural resource damage. Accordingly, transparency of funding for ecological restoration and conservation, as well as commodity extraction and other activities in the NLCS, is critical to ensuring that the BLM is living up to its primary conservation obligations.
- *Increase BLM's ability to highlight its land conservation activities.* The creation of the NLCS not only gives the BLM a new conservation mission, but also a remarkable public relations opportunity to convey an image as an agency committed to sustainable land stewardship. With a more transparent NLCS budget the BLM will be better able to describe its balanced approach to land management.
- *Raise the profile of the NLCS and its units.* This, in turn, can help attract new partnerships and spark state and local interest in cost-sharing opportunities.

A cross-cut budget is a practical solution to the NLCS budget's current lack of transparency. Directing the BLM to make this simple change in the budget would be a big step in the right direction of enhancing and supporting this special new system, and making government better.