

Bureau of Land Management Paleontology Permitting Process Study Summary of Report

Introduction

The BLM was interested in conducting a survey of paleontologists who have applied for permits since January 1, 2002, to conduct surface surveys and excavations on BLM lands. To accomplish this task, the BLM contracted with the Social Research Laboratory at Northern Arizona University, through the Colorado Plateau Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit. The purpose of this survey was to obtain the perspective of paleontology permit applicants on how the BLM administers the paleontology permitting process. Survey results identify opportunities for improvement in the process. Similar to other use authorization processes, processing paleontology permits is a complex endeavor about which BLM's customers can provide excellent feedback.

Methods

Two focus groups were conducted with paleontologists in Salt Lake City, Utah and Denver, Colorado to identify salient issues to be explored in a telephone interview. Sixty-five paleontologists participated in the telephone survey and each interview lasted between 15-20 minutes.

Survey Findings

The majority of paleontologists surveyed agreed that

- Electronic submission of permits would work best
- The paleontology permitting experience has been “very positive” or “somewhat positive”
- The BLM is “very supportive” of paleontology
- Permit applications are reviewed in an unbiased manor
- Reporting requirements are clear and understandable
- There is a workable timeframe for reporting
- Reporting requirements are standard and consistent across BLM offices
- Reports are read and reviewed by BLM staff
- SLCS permits get processed more quickly

Suggestions for Improving Permitting Process

The majority of paleontologists surveyed agreed that it was important to

- Reduce the favoritism and political bias at the field office level
- Increase consistency between BLM offices
- Reexamine system of repositories
- Have at least one paleontologist on staff at the field office
- Allow only one permittee per excavation site
- Improve communication and cooperation between BLM offices, paleontologists and repositories
- Streamline application process and reporting requirements