

### BLM LE History Part 5.3

The BLM is purposefully decentralized in organizational structure in order to keep the management of the public lands closely tied to the needs of local constituents. The supervision of the law enforcement program is no different, and at all levels law enforcement officers were supervised by line managers. The national chief of law enforcement and the national chief ranger have historically reported to an assistant deputy director one program branch or another. Special agents in charge and state staff rangers report to their respective state directors. Field rangers report to line managers or to intermediate supervisory rangers who report directly to line managers. Among the first rangers, there was a sharp difference of opinion regarding the law enforcement policy statement within the context of the current organizational structure. Some rangers believed educating the public was the best way to protect public lands and resources and stay closely connected with mainstream BLM. Other rangers lobbied for specialized equipment and autonomy within the law enforcement hierarchy arguing law enforcement was a specialized function that needed specialized oversight and required equipment, training, and preparation deemed unnecessary by line managers. In spite of this, in 1981 BLM hired its first canine unit in the Barstow Resource Area and added its second canine unit in the El Centro Resource Area in 1984. BLM soon recognized, however, civilian line managers were not adequately trained or prepared to manage a law enforcement function. With the fall of the cactus curtain in 1985, BLM was finally allowed to expand the ranger program outside the California Desert District. By 1986, not only were rangers stationed in Oregon, Arizona,

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New Mexico, Idaho, and Nevada, but all BLM law enforcement officers were finally equipped with shotguns as part of their standard issued defensive equipment. BLM also conducted the first law enforcement for managers' class at FLETC in 1986. Subsequently by policy, only line managers who have attended law enforcement for managers may supervise BLM law enforcement personnel. In 1988, BLM hired 20 additional rangers in the California Desert District. The expansion of the law enforcement program was in the direct correlation to ever increasing use of the public lands and the rapid encroachment of adjacent population centers. BLM law enforcement officers were confronted with new challenges as adjacent public lands were too often used as a dumping ground for burgeoning population centers and criminal activity more typical in urban settings began to spill out onto the public lands. Over the Easter weekend in 1989, a Tucson ranger became the first BLM law enforcement officer shot in the line of duty as he approached the residence of an individual suspected of natural resource theft from public lands. In 1989, the United States Supreme Court issued its decision in *Graham V. Connor*. In summary, the court ruled that a law enforcement officer need not wait on the overt actions of an assailant to take proactive measures to prevent violence, subdue a violator, or affect an arrest. The court ruled that a regional officer was entitled to use whatever amount of force necessary under the totality of the circumstances of the moment to prevent harm or escape. BLM law enforcement officers who attended FLETC prior to about 2003 were trained to evaluate the response to a subject's actions through implementation of what was known as a use-of-force model. The use-of-force

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model compelled a law enforcement officer to decide on a course of reaction, placing the law enforcement officer at a distinct disadvantage when dealing with threats of violence. Although it would take nearly 15 years for FLETC to retool its training techniques to reflect the court's decision in Graham, BLM law enforcement officers who attend FLETC currently are now trained to respond proactively to the threat of violence and are instilled with the confidence that their actions will be judged by the totality of the circumstances they face during the heat of the moment.

Dennis McLane moved to Washington D.C. to become BLM's first national chief ranger in 1990. As BLM expanded the law enforcement program to every western public land state in the 1990s, McLane continued to develop standardized law enforcement policy. Work he had begun as the first California Desert District Ranger. McLane saw to the modernization of law enforcement equipment as BLM law enforcement officers transitioned from Smith and Wesson revolvers to the Sig Sauer semiautomatic handgun. Additionally, McLane oversaw the assignment of a drug-detecting dog to a special agent in Oregon, BLM's third canine unit. The illicit cultivation of marijuana on public lands has been and continues to be a threat to the health of the public lands and the safety of visitors and employees alike. In the early years of the law enforcement program, BLM law enforcement officers were detailed to California's campaign against marijuana planting initiative for two-week rotations throughout the marijuana harvest season. Camp's primary goal was simply to eradicate

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marijuana plants. BLM law enforcement conducted its own marijuana eradication operation during the summer of 1990 dubbed Operation Green Sweep, a two-week long marijuana eradication operation in the remote mountains of Humboldt County in California. Utilizing the National Guard for support, Operation Green Sweep brought national attention to BLM's marijuana eradication efforts. Local Garberville media labeled Operation Green Sweep as the US invasion of Humboldt County.

BLM once again made national headlines as its law enforcement officers shut down the infamous Barstow to Vagus motorcycle race over the Thanksgiving weekend in 1990. The Barstow to Vagus was a free-for-all event where participants lined up in the Mohave Desert outside Barstow and upon the start signal rode cross country through the desert landscape until they reached Las Vegas. BLM tried unsuccessfully for several years to manage the Barstow to Vagus by restricting the race to existing routes in order to protect critical desert tortoise habitat; however, defiant race participants and spectators largely ignored BLM's travel restrictions. With the listing of the desert tortoise on the endangered species list in 1990, BLM could not permit the event. Nevertheless, a large group of protestors showed up at the historic start line as a distraction for protest riders who attempted to ride the race. BLM law enforcement officers arrested many of the protest riders and impounded their motorcycles.