**LAND RECORDS**

One of the most important services the BLM provides is as caretaker of the nation's land survey and mineral information records. These records originate with the founding of the nation. Congress created the General Land Office (GLO) in 1812 to handle the increasing land business from the rapid westward expansion. The GLO was given the responsibility for maintaining the land and mineral records. Since 1946 these and other federal land and mineral records have been maintained by the BLM in a growing serialized casefile system, which today nationwide contains more than two billion documents. Many of these serialized cases have been abstracted and made available on-line through the Bureau of Land Management Lands and Mineral Records-LR2000 database at [www.blm.gov/lr2000](http://www.blm.gov/lr2000). The database contains mining claim data and information about federal current and historical leases, permits, land and mineral acquisitions, sales and exchanges, grants, withdrawals and more. BLM also has continued to maintain the official Land Status and Cadastral Survey records since the GLO days. These records are comprised of the Master Title Plats, Historical Index pages, Cadastral Plats and Survey Notes organized by state, township and range.

**MASTER TITLE PLATS**

Master Title Plats are large-scale graphic representations of current Federal ownership, agency jurisdiction, and rights reserved to the federal government on private land. Federal ownership of the subsurface mineral estate and acquisitions, exchanges, and sales involving federal lands are also identified. Rights granted or permitted to private parties for such commercial activities as road rights-of-way, power lines, pipelines, and communication sites are symbolized on the Master Title Plats. Private lands are identified with the original patent number reflecting ownership transfer out of federal jurisdiction. Supplemental Plats are created for portions of those Master Title Plats where detail is so dense that a larger cartographic scale is required. Use Plats have been created when necessary to show location and identification of oil and gas leases, geothermal leases, and other fluid and solid mineral activities. Gradually the use plats are being combined with the Master Title Plats and new Master Title Use Plats are created. It is important to note that mining claims are not shown on any of the Plats.

**LAND LEGAL DESCRIPTIONS**

A legal description/land description is the method of locating or describing land in relation to the public land survey system, which was established by law in 1785, under the Articles of Confederation. Land is broken down into areas called townships. Townships are for the most part 36 square miles or 6 miles square. Each township is broken down into 36 sections; each section is usually 640 acres. Sections in each township are numbered consecutively beginning with number 1 in the northeast corner of the township, and counting right to left then left to right and so on weaving back and forth through the sections of the township, and ending with number 36 in the southeast corner. In Oregon and Washington the rectangular survey system of township and range is referenced to the north-south Willamette Meridian and the east-west Willamette Base Line. The lines cross on the Willamette Stone in the west hills of Portland, Oregon. Townships (normally 6 miles by 6 miles) are numbered starting with Township 1 North (of the base line) to the Canadian border and Township 1 South to the California border. The Ranges are numbered west from the meridian to the Pacific Ocean and east to the Idaho border. Normal townships are divided into 36 Sections and further into Lots and Aliquot Parts. The complete legal
land description for a 160 acre parcel in eastern Oregon would read: the SE1/4 of Section 14 in Township 14 South, Range 34 East, Willamette Meridian.

When you write a legal description, you can start with the Township and Range or you can start with the section description. Which ever way you start, when you are writing the description of the section, always start with the smallest piece of land first and graduating to the largest piece.

The section diagram below shows the section broken down into 16 pieces. Since each section is 640 acres, each section shown in the diagram will be 40 acres.

**Section 12, Township 27N Range 32E, WM**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NW1/4</th>
<th></th>
<th>NE1/4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SW1/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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In this example you would write the legal description for the portion with the "X" as follows: NE1/4SW1/4, Sec.12, T27N R32E WM or WM, T 27N, R 32E, Section 12, NE1/4 SW1/4

All lands in the states of Washington and Oregon are measured from the Willamette Meridian. You need to include this in your legal description.

The diagram below illustrates a subdivision of a normal one square mile Section of land (640 acres).
HISTORICAL INDICIES

Each township with a Master Title Plat is further documented by a tabular summary of all actions taken on Federal lands over time. The Historical Indices pages contain more information, such as date, serial number, and authority for the action than is presented on the Master Title Plats. The earliest entries are typically the original grants to the State at the time of statehood, and continue with the posting of homestead patents, withdrawals for national forests, land exchanges, sales, and leases.
CADASTRAL SURVEY PLATS

Cadastral surveys create, restore, mark, and define boundaries of parcels of land for describing individual ownership. The official survey plat is a graphic representation, drawn to scale, depicting the actual survey as described in the official field notes. The plat illustrates lot sizes and locations, bearings and distances, and corners, courses and distances of surveyed lines for rectangular, mineral, homestead surveys, and other metes and bounds parcels.

TITLE & AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENTS

The BLM maintains a set of records called the Control Document Index. It consists of microfilmed copies of patents and deeds which convey title to and from the United States. It also includes microfilmed copies of documents which affect or have affected control, or limit or restrict the availability of right, title, or use of federal lands. The Control Document Index microfilm cards are arranged chronologically within the township and range.
To obtain copies of patents and deeds, the legal land description is required. At a minimum the township and range, section, and lot or aliquot part would also be needed in obtaining a copy of these records. Finally, the patent number and date, if known, are also helpful in these searches.

SERIAL REGISTER PAGES

For all lands and minerals actions a case file has been established, and since 1908 each case is identified with a serial number (for example, OR 012345, WA 012345). The serial number appears on the Historical Indices and for certain cases on the Master Title Plats as well. For each serialized case, a Serial Register Page is available.
The Serial Register Page (or pages) contains more information than is found on the Master Title Plat or Historical Indices and is an abstract of the case. Significant steps are identified and dated as well as the current case disposition.

HISTORICAL LAND STATUS RECORDS

In 1789 Congress established the Treasury Department and gave it the responsibility of overseeing the sale of public lands and on April 25, 1812 the General Land Office (GLO) was created within the Treasury Department. Headed by a commissioner, the new bureau was responsible for the survey and sale of public lands. Field offices of the GLO were established, served the needs of the local settlers, and were closed as patterns of migration and settlement dictated.
The General Land Office was transferred to the new Department of the Interior in 1849 and continued to establish field offices in the western territories and states. Oregon and Washington Land Offices began with the Oregon City Land Office (1855 to 1905) and were established in many towns including Olympia, Seattle, Walla Walla, Yakima, and Spokane in Washington and Burns, Lakeview, Roseburg, The Dalles, and Vale in Oregon. The local land offices in Oregon and Washington were closed by 1948 - 1949 and all of the survey and homestead records were consolidated in the Portland office.
These historic land status records were maintained in Plat Books and Tract Books organized by township until the "new" Master Title Plats and Historical Indices were compiled in the 1960s. The Plat Books and Tract Books often contain a more detailed summary of land dispositions for the time period. The pages of the books have been filmed and are available on microfilm rolls. Copies of pages may be ordered from the Land Office.
Source(s):
- [http://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/](http://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/)
  - Oregon – Washington BLM link...
  - **New Mexico – OK – TX – KS BLM link...**