Livestock grazing, desert, sage grouse, oil and gas are things that the BLM nationally is known to manage. Harbor seals and managing the land underneath the largest and longest glacier in North America seems beyond possible. But in the early 2000’s harbor seals that characteristically inhabit glacial fjords were discovered in Vitas Lake at the terminus of Alaska's Bering Glacier. Beginning in the summer of 2003, Ryan Cooper, a summer intern with BLM’s Bering Glacier Research Camp participated with the University of Alaska in the capture, and tagging of the harbor seal population found in Vitas Lake.

Ryan remembers, "I had just graduated from high school and it was my first experience in a scientific research community. I spent my first two weeks dropping nets, capturing, weighing, taking blood samples and collaring harbor seals."

His job didn't end there. "I also worked with botanists from the University of Alaska running inventories on plant colonies above the Bagley Ice Field. I had heard that glacial ice is blue because it transmits the short wavelengths of light, but it's stunning to see it for the first time!"

In the evenings, back at camp, Ryan could hear the glacier calving in the far distance as he listened to talk...
around the campfire about: tomorrow’s activities, safety, what’s for dinner, updates on glacial hydrology and recent bear sightings around camp.

Little did he know that his time at Bering Glacier would change his life. According to Ryan, "When I heard this internship promised weeks of living outdoors in a remote field camp working with university scientists in south east Alaska I jumped at the opportunity. Growing up in Alaska led to my strong interest in the outdoors, but just graduating from high school I still was uncertain on careers. At the time, I was thinking about becoming an airline pilot."

The BLM began research at Bering Glacier in 1999 and continued to 2011. Initially, former BLM Wildlife Biologist John Payne worked with the US Forest Service to determine whether Dusky Canada Geese inhabited the forelands of the Glacier.

BLM’s work expanded over time to include climate change, glacial ablation and movements, harbor seal studies, and a botanical inventory of the Bering Glacier region (see: Bering Glacier, Interdisciplinary studies of Earth’s Largest Temperate Surging Glacier, pub. 201, US Geological Society of America). The BLM also partnered with local high schools to take on students as interns to work with and shadow scientists from Michigan Tech and the University of Alaska.

The Bering Glacier region is comprised of 850,000 acres of BLM-managed land, most of which is under the ice of the glacier. The studies at the BLM field camp evolved into an international, multidisciplinary program that has provided a better understanding of this dynamic area and the impacts of climate change on Alaska’s glaciers.

Ryan’s perspective on his future was challenged at this point in 2003. He recalls that, “After working with BLM resources specialists and university researchers, my interest in environmental science began. Until my internship I wasn’t aware that careers in environmental science even existed. I refocused my interest on Arctic biology and six years later completed a MS through the University of Alaska
Fairbanks under a program called the *Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR)*.”

His time at EPSCoR provided Ryan with a wealth of Alaskan and Washington D.C. regulatory, policy, and advocacy experience. His success in conservation and statistics led him to lecture at many universities, including Harvard and Cornell.

Today Ryan is a Senior Environmental Scientist for Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) and for the last 6 years has focused his work on bridging the gap between Arctic research and policy implementation. This has brought him back to working again with BLM, helping to set priorities for Arctic research with the North Slope Science Initiative (NSSI). At the latest NSSI workshop Ryan renewed his friendships seeing old friends from his time at the Bering Glacier. While at the meeting his thoughts traveled back thirteen years to the life changing summer at the largest glacier in North America. *(For more photos and information about this project see www.beringglacier.org).*