

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FOREST SERVICE RETIREES POSITION PAPER

ISSUE: Continuing efforts to transfer the National Forests and Grasslands and other public lands to States.

BACKGROUND: For many years efforts to transfer federal public lands to the States have arisen in occasional legislative initiatives that eventually failed. Notable in that discussion was the Sagebrush Rebellion that began in the late Seventies. But beginning in 2012 ten of the eleven Western states commissioned or considered studies to push the issue. In the spring of 2013 twelve initiatives reached western legislatures and three passed.

These state legislative efforts refuse to disappear despite the near legal impossibility they can succeed because of the long history of federal public land being settled law by the Supreme Court. But they could succeed immediately with a change in federal law. The movement to enact land transfer has focused in Utah partly because of the passage by the legislature and signature by the Governor of the 2012 Transfer of Public Lands Act which demands the federal government cede 20 million acres to the state. At this time the Chair of the House Resources committee is Utah Congressman Rob Bishop who supports land transfer. In addition, on the first day of its new session the House passed a new rule designed to make it easier to transfer land to states, local communities, or Indian tribes by assuming those transfers would be cost free to the federal government. This eliminates one budgetary barrier to land transfer bills. Since that time, the issue has gained public attention and significant support has been generated to keep public lands public.

THE NAFSR POSITION: NAFSR unconditionally opposes the transfer of the National Forests and Grasslands and other public lands to the states.

We believe Theodore Roosevelt was right. Our public lands belong to all Americans. Roosevelt defied convention and acted to save America's diminishing national resources bringing 230 million acres of public land under protection as national forests, refuges, parks, and monuments. He and Gifford Pinchot whom Roosevelt appointed first Chief of the US Forest Service are credited with establishing the modern conservation ethic by using scientific management principles that have become the bedrock of public land management policy.

History shows transferring the national forests and public lands to the states is the first step to their eventual sale. Most of the western states have lands they were given at statehood and collectively have sold over half of them. The basic numbers are:

Acres of federal land entrusted to Western states: 64 million
Acres of those lands sold by Western states: 34 million (53%)
Acres of federal land entrusted to the 48 contiguous states: 156 million
Acres of those public trust lands states have sold: 110 million (70%)

NAFSR believes the possible loss of our National Forests and Grasslands and public lands heritage must be resisted in every possible way. Once privatized they are gone forever.

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING: Many statements and articles by conservation, preservation, and outdoor related organizations have recently appeared. This paragraph from the hunting and fishing point of view nicely summarizes much of the sentiment beginning to arise and is taken from a recent Field and Stream Magazine in depth story.

Our country is at a crossroads moment. If we let federal public lands be transferred to the states, most of them will be sold: there is just too much evidence to believe otherwise. But as it stands, every American hunter and fisherman can dream of someday adventuring West to experience the magnificence of our country, and do it on a shoe string if necessary, with kids in sleeping bags and ramen noodles on the campfire. This dream exists only because our public lands belong to every American, whether you live on a thousand acres or in a rented room. We are all-every US citizen-invested in this, the very dirt of our nation. These lands are a bedrock institution of our country, as crucial as the Bill of Rights.

NAFSR STRATEGY AND ACTIONS:

1. Devote individual and organizational energy working with the public and communities to build trust and appreciation of public lands.
2. Should a serious legislative threat to our national forests and public lands occur, update a pre-prepared coordinated legislative communications action plan to influence the outcome similar to our process when the Forest Service shield was in jeopardy.
3. Join the efforts of a larger coalition similar to our current role with the Partner Caucus for resolving the Wildfire suppression funding issue.
4. Ensure our top priority is keeping the National Forests and Grasslands and public lands public. Our efforts to support active management and forest restoration, to resolve the wildfire suppression funding issue and wildfire management issues, to keep wilderness wild, and everything else we support is meaningless if we lose them.

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