

NAFSR Talking Points on Disposal of Public Lands

August 7, 2025

As you are aware, the amendment in budget reconciliation legislation that would have forced the sale of up to three million acres of public lands was recently defeated. It took the involvement and dedication of many organizations including NAFSR and tens of thousands of people from across the spectrum of public lands users. The primary message at this point is to understand there will likely be further attempts using different strategies. This battle is not over and may just be beginning. Keeping our public lands public will require constant involvement and vigilance. Your Board will stay involved and has a team that will continue to closely monitor the issue. The following general “Talking Points” about the direct sale of our public lands or transfer to the States are provided for your continuing use:

- There is probably no greater public lands issue than their loss. Could we really lose our treasured National Forests and Grasslands by having them transferred or privatized? The answer is **possibly**, unless you and millions of other Americans get involved. There could be further attempts to directly sell public lands or transfer our public land to the States. Transfer to the States could actually be a two-step process to disposal. History shows that giving public land to the states can be the first step to their eventual sale to private interests. Most of the western states have land they received at statehood. In total they have disposed of around 31,000,000 acres since statehood. There have been bills floated in various state legislatures to dispose of additional state lands. At issue is not the ability of state land managers to professionally manage state lands. Our observation has been that they do a good job. The issue is, once transferred, those lands can more readily be disposed of. Processes to do so vary by state, as do state legislative mandates on how to manage them.
- If you enjoy camping, hunting, fishing, skiing, mountain biking, snowmobiling, riding an OHV, horseback riding, bird watching, rafting, mountain climbing, and many other outdoor recreation activities without having to face a “No Trespassing” sign, then you are encouraged to take action if there is a public land transfer or land sale proposal.
- Actively support the bipartisan *Public Lands in Public Hands Act* (Congress.gov H.R. 718). This bill would require congressional approval for selling or transferring public lands managed by the Department of Interior or the US Forest Service. Colorado College’s most recent State of the Rockies poll, which is a gold standard measurement of the public lands pulse across eight western states. shows that 65% of voters **oppose** transferring federal land to states. Eighty-nine per cent want to keep National Monument designations in place. According to the poll, by a nine to one ratio, western voters prefer that career professionals make decisions about natural resources on federal lands. You can find all these details online in the Colorado College Conservation in the West poll.

- For those who work in the massive outdoor recreation industry that depends on these lands being available to average Americans, many could lose their jobs. Americans could lose their access. You will hear that the recent and continuing loss of thousands of employees in our federal natural resource agencies will result in work not getting done on the ground. We agree with that assessment and are concerned that it could lead to more calls for federal land transfer because public services are not being provided, and work is not getting done on the ground.
- President Theodore Roosevelt had it right. Our public lands belong to all Americans and should be managed under federal protection. He acted to save America's diminishing natural resources and brought 230 million acres of public land under protection as national forests, refuges, parks and monuments. They are the envy of the world and managed using scientific principles that have become the bedrock of public land management policy. Go anywhere in America and enjoy the fruits of those wise decisions we have enjoyed for well over 100 years. Are there ways to be more efficient and find new processes and save money? Yes. There always are. Gained efficiencies were especially notable because of technological advances during our careers. Losing our heritage of public lands in America is not the answer. Once these treasured lands are gone, they are likely gone forever.
- NAFSR is not totally opposed to the proposal to identify and transfer, sell, or lease federal lands to local communities close to metropolitan areas to be used for affordable housing if adequate controls and processes are in place. The *Southern Nevada Public Land and Management Act enacted in 1998*, the *Forest Service Facilities Realignment and Enhancement Act of 2005*, and the *Flexible Partnership Act* which was part of the last Farm Bill are good examples of successful legislation that may be useful today.
- The answer to pushing back on federal public land disposal is to get involved in whatever way you can. There is an organization for every outdoor pursuit. Join one and work with your friends to make a difference. But above all, now in this moment of potential danger to our public land heritage...be ready to contact your legislators, go to their meetings, and let them know what you think. Ask your family and friends and organizations to do the same, because always remember when American's public lands are gone, they're gone!