



One of the greatest threats facing sportsmen today is the radical proposal to “transfer” millions of acres of federal public lands to the states.

But make no mistake – it’s a land grab.

These lands belong to all of us and already support a vibrant outdoor recreation economy. Individual states do not have the resources to manage these additional lands without selling or leasing them for development – and locking the public out of areas that hunters, anglers and others have enjoyed for generations.

We urge all our public officials, from Congress to the New Mexico Legislature, county commissions and city councils, to reject this ill-conceived and unpopular land grab. Here’s why:

Sportsmen will lose

Hunting and fishing are part of our heritage and a core cultural land use value, and almost 90 percent of New Mexico sportsmen hunt or fish on public lands. Together we spend more than \$579 million annually. Without public lands, hunting and fishing – and the jobs they support – will eventually disappear.

Public lands have broad support

Recent polling found that 84 percent of New Mexico voters see public lands as an essential part of New Mexico’s economy and 78 percent oppose selling off public lands, even to help reduce the national debt.

Sustainable economic engine

Public lands already support a vibrant and growing outdoor recreation economy. At least 65 percent of New Mexicans hunt, fish, hike, camp or enjoy some

other form of outdoor recreation, mostly on public lands. Outdoor recreation in New Mexico draws thousands of visitors and generates \$458 million in tax revenue, \$6.1 billion in consumer spending and more than 68,000 jobs.

End game clear: exploit and liquidate

Sportsmen fear that public lands will be privatized and closed to the public if transferred to the states, and that exploitation will trump multiple-use management. Otero County is considering an ordinance prioritizing mineral extraction and grazing as the only legitimate land uses. Nevada’s task force recommends selling off 30,000 acres of any federal lands it receives in the first year alone to fund state management cost. The direction is clear.

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... 'Transfer' another term for 'land grab'

Fires burn through money

The cost of managing federal lands will overwhelm states like New Mexico. Fire suppression costs alone are staggering. In 2011 and 2012, the U.S. Forest Service spent more than \$240 million fighting fires in New Mexico. Fire prevention efforts are exorbitantly expensive, with thinning estimated at \$1,200 per acre. Post-fire restoration efforts cost millions more, and continue for years.

Taxpayers on the hook

New Mexico counties will lose some \$35 million a year in federal aid payments if BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands are transferred to the state. At the same time New Mexico would have to replace some 2,200 federal employees and more than \$235 million in payroll costs to manage the lands. Today those costs are borne by all U.S. taxpayers; in the future only New Mexicans would bear that burden.

Costly legal quagmire ahead

Under the Enabling Acts that allowed New Mexico and other western states to join the union, the states gave up all claims to federal land. Constitutional scholars have said that suing the federal government to turn over public lands to the states will be a fruitless and expensive endeavor.

Threat is serious

"Transfer of public lands" bills have been introduced in New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Montana, Idaho and Wyoming, and passed in Utah and Arizona,



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although the Arizona law was vetoed. Several states have established task forces to study the idea and the Republican National Committee has adopted a resolution supporting state takeovers of public lands.

Our heritage is on the line

The concept of public land is distinctly American, a direct result of our forebears living in places where a person could be punished or even killed for entering the "king's forest" or hunting the "king's deer." Public lands were created to provide places where anyone properly licensed could hunt or fish.

This unpopular effort to seize federal public lands will be expensive, divisive and ultimately futile.

The sportsmen and women of New Mexico see the so-called "transfer of public lands" as a threat to our way of life. The money required to study the idea – much less to fight the federal government in court – would be better spent working to improve state management of our own public lands and engaging federal land agencies to be more efficient and responsive to the public they serve.

Keep our public lands in public hands!