

## **Talking points in Opposition to the Bush Administration's Proposal to Sell Of Public Forest Service Land to Fund its Obligations Under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act**

---

### **MORE INFORMATION:**

The bi-partisan Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act (SRSCSDA) was passed in 2000 to stabilize the level of federal payments to approximately 700 counties nationwide that historically depended on timber revenues from adjacent national forest lands. The law guarantees payments to eligible rural counties for public education and transportation projects. The Bush administration now proposes to pay for another five-year authorization of the law by selling \$800 million-worth of National Forest land, resulting in largest sale of federal public land in decades. For an explanation of the plan, see [http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/rural\\_schools.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/rural_schools.shtml).

The Bush administration's 2007 budget plan seeks raise money from public land sales (which they say will then establish new local taxing sources) to pay for schools and roads, and hope to eventually eliminate their obligation required under the SRSCSDA (the plan would eliminate funding by 2011). Still, many schools would rather not risk this new plan that could result in the loss of popular recreation areas (that also provide economic benefits) while also failing to provide a reliable new source of money to replace the old system.

While some small obscure properties surrounded by private property and are a burden to the agency and land owners alike should be sold, many public climbing areas could be at risk of private purchase, forever restricting climbing access. Many, including various US Senators, have noted that the agency rushed the compilation of the auction list, and as a result the public could lose lands they value without ever knowing they were for sale.

Congress is also overwhelmingly against the new plan—both Republicans and Democrats worry that the proposal would sell off valued public lands, only fund the rural schools and infrastructure program at 50% of current levels for just five years, and then end the county payments program altogether. The proposal would also pit states against each other, forcing competition for benefits. Last year, the west coast states of Oregon, California and Washington claimed more than two-thirds of the \$393 million the program provided to schools, roads and other services in those counties. Under the new proposal, Oregon alone would get \$162 million in exchange for 10,581 acres. Washington would get \$46.9 million in exchange for 7,516 acres.

Most of the lands proposed to be sold are in states that get little of the money, and very little land is proposed to be sold in the states that get the most money. Even the winners are losers under this proposal:

California would receive \$69 million for selling about 80,000 acres.

In Idaho, 26,194 acres of public National Forest land have been targeted for the sale, including more than 5,000 acres in the Sawtooth National Forest.

In Colorado, more than 21,000 acres in 11 national forests and grasslands are listed as potential auction candidates.

21,566 acres in Missouri's Mark Twain National Forest would be sold, with proceeds going to a general fund. Missouri's share of the school-funding is among the lowest at \$2.7 million.

In Wyoming, 17,619 acres are potentially for sale in the Black Hills, Medicine Bow and Bridger-Teton National Forests and the Thunder Basin National Grassland.

In North Carolina, the Forest Service has proposed selling nearly 10,000 acres.

New Mexico would get \$2.3 million, just one-fifth of 1 percent of the overall proceeds, in exchange for selling 8,000 acres, or 2 percent of the sales.

4,600 acres in South Carolina would be for sale along with 2,700 acres in Nevada.

870 acres of Indian's Hoosier National Forest are listed for auction, yet Indiana would get nearly nothing in return.

#### ADDITIONAL LETTER WRITING TALKING POINTS:

First and foremost, look up your state on the map link here (<http://www.geocommunicator.gov/NILS-PARCEL2/map.jsp?Map=USFS>) to see if your crag is at risk for sale, and if so tell the Forest Service to take your crag off the list because it is currently very valuable to the public for recreation. Local recreational benefits include the health of locals that recreate there as well as economic benefits to the community where climbers frequent and spend money. Also, state that you vote and will make sure your federal legislators are aware of your specific concerns.

The Forest Service, who says that they are only considering isolated parcels that no longer meet national forest system needs, have nonetheless included previously proposed wilderness areas in California and popular recreation areas in Colorado on the auction list.

Although the plan would give the majority of benefits to states that suffered the most by federal policies that restricted logging in the 1990s (a few western states are well over 50% federally-owned, yet saw a 95 % timber harvest reduction in their local forests), the regional disparity in state benefits under the Bush proposal are unfair and divisive, and there's no guarantee that money generated by the sales would stay within the states where the land will be sold.

Only about 10 percent of the proceeds would go toward rural schools in the South and Midwest, the two regions where more than a third of the sales of 300,000-plus acres would occur.

The land sales would set a dangerous precedent, by relying on the permanent sale of public resources to fund local schools and road projects. Selling off America's natural heritage is not the way to fund short-term government services needs. This proposal will lead to choosing our valued local natural resources to pay for education needs that may be several states away. Special places in one state may be sold to pay for school kids across the country.

These public land sales could undermine important conservation efforts to preserve unique landscapes such as near Rocky Mountain National Park. The Forest Service has long attempted to consolidate open space by getting easements and restraining development and the Forest Service often land trades for such conservation purposes. However, this new plan could derail many of these longstanding conservation efforts.

Short-term gains would be offset by the permanent loss of public lands, and profits from the proposed sales would fall far short of what's needed to help rural governments pay for schools and other basic services.

County payments are an extremely important funding source for counties with Forest Service land inside their boundaries, but to propose selling off public lands we will lose forever, in exchange for a program we can pay for by other more prudent means, is irresponsible.

Climbers, bikers, boaters, hunters, anglers, campers and other recreational users benefit from and depend on access to public lands. Selling public lands to pay down the deficit would be a shortsighted, ill-advised and irresponsible shift in federal land-management policy.

#### WRITE THE FOREST SERVICE

The Forest Service will receive comments to their proposed list of lands for sale through March 30. Send email to [SRS\\_Land\\_Sales@fs.fed.us](mailto:SRS_Land_Sales@fs.fed.us), and written comments to:

USDA Forest Service  
SRS Comments, Lands 4S  
1400 Independence Ave., SW, Mailstop 1124  
Washington, DC, 20250-0003.  
Faxes go to (202) 205-1604