



---

**PRINTABLE VERSION: Thursday, September 6, 2007**

## **9. PUBLIC LANDS: Agencies log land purchases under 2000 act** (09/06/2007)

**Arthur O'Donnell, *Land Letter* editor**

Federal land agencies this week said they will spend \$18 million to acquire about 9,000 acres in 19 separate parcels throughout the West. Many of the properties are located in or adjacent to federally owned parks, forests, wildlife refuges or monument areas located in seven states. The money for the purchases comes from other federal land sales authorized by the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act of 2000.

While the law has raised significant controversy because of previous plans by the Bush administration for extensive sales, this marks the first purchases from willing sellers who possess "inholdings" on or near public lands. "These purchases promote conservation while helping ensure efficient and effective public lands management," said Deputy Interior Secretary Lynn Scarlett in a statement this week.

The Bureau of Land Management said it has completed or is near completing the purchase of 10 parcels comprising about 3,200 acres for \$10 million. Among the lands are properties that can be joined with such protected areas as the North Platte River special recreation management area in Wyoming, the the La Cienega/El Camino Real National Historic Trail in New Mexico, and the Snake River area of critical environmental concern in Idaho. The Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife and the National Park Service are also picking up another nine properties for a combined \$9 million. The agencies declined to identify the specific lands until sales transactions are completed but said they are located in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho and Oregon.

The 2000 act authorized the sales of fragmented or isolated parcels of public land that are considered difficult to manage, as well as properties that might have commercial or residential development value. The proposal last year to direct the sale of more than \$350 million in Bureau of Land Management lands over 10 years, with 70 percent of proceeds going to the U.S. Treasury to help pay down the budget deficit, went nowhere in Congress.

Earlier this year, the proposal was revamped to sales that bring in \$186 million over five years and \$334 million over the next decade, but strong outcries from the environmental community have kept that plan bottled up in committee as well.

According to BLM spokesman Tom Gorey, there have been about \$94.6 million in public land sales under terms of the act since it was passed in July 2000.

BLM has had authority to sell lands identified for disposal through the land-use planning process since 1976. What distinguishes FLTFA is that a portion of sales proceeds may be retained for land acquisitions.

In announcing the purchase transactions, Scarlett also promoted an extension of the act through 2018; otherwise it would sunset in 2010. The latest proposal would also allow sales of lands designated after July 2000 and change the distribution of proceeds so that 70 percent goes to Treasury, with 30 percent to the Federal Land Disposal Account. Up to 50 percent of the funds in the account could be used for conservation enhancement projects rather than only for land purchases.

"The benefits of this sale-authority law are clear," she said.