

c/o Legislative Services Office, Research and Legislation

P.O. Box 83720, Boise, Idaho 83720-0054

Dear Subcommittee members,

I am a forester and nearly 40-year resident of Idaho. Here are the reasons I am **opposed** to the transfer of federal forests and rangelands to the State of Idaho.

1. **The costs are too high.** You must calculate and consider the following quantifiable expenses, among others:
 - a. **Fire suppression.** Last year, almost two million acres of National Forest and BLM land burned. The cost to fight these fires was over \$210 million. Other recent years have been worse, and future costs will rise. There is no evidence the State could protect these lands and those who live on or near them at less expense.
 - b. **Road maintenance.** There are several thousand miles of road, some surfaced, some graveled, and some unimproved, on National Forest and BLM land. There are thousands of culverts and bridges. Because of underfunding, the backlog of needed maintenance on this infrastructure is staggering. You must ask hard questions about the estimated costs, and consider whether the State can commit state taxpayers to the long-term obligation to fund both annual maintenance needs and fix the backlog.
 - c. **Campgrounds, trails, and other improvements.** There are thousands of miles of trails, hundreds of developed campgrounds, and other improvements on National Forests and BLM lands, again with a tremendous backlog of needed maintenance, as well as annual costs to keep them useable and safe. The State could of course charge user fees, but to recover all of the costs, too many Idahoans would be priced out. Commercializing campgrounds and constraining access to these lands would make many very angry. We have historically used these lands with few constraints and at small cost, if any.
2. **The benefits are uncertain.** In evaluating whether State management of federal timberlands will provide the hoped-for benefits, you must recognize that the timber industry has changed. The jobs it provided in the 80s, before the decline in harvests of federal timber, aren't there now. Consider:
 - a. **Timber harvest is highly mechanized.** With the advent of whole tree harvesters and other equipment such as forwarders, the number of workers involved in moving logs from stump to mill is far lower. Fallers, skidder operators, choker setters, and landing sawyers, for example, have been replaced by machines.
 - b. **Mills employ far fewer workers.** Mills, too, are highly mechanized and far more efficient than the mills that have closed around the State. They do not provide the same number of jobs.
 - c. **Too few Idaho mills can process large logs.** Most of the mills that have closed in the last 20 years were built to process large diameter timber. They closed because the supply of large logs declined and because they could not efficiently process small logs. Only a few were reconfigured to handle small diameter logs. Much of the timber that could potentially be harvested on federal lands is large diameter. Like much of the large diameter timber cut from State and private lands now, it would very likely be transported, by truck or barge, to mills in other states, with little direct benefit to Idaho communities.

- d. **Federal timber payments to Idaho counties are unlikely to be replaced by other revenues.** Idaho counties receive, and depend on, nearly \$50 million in federal timber dollars yearly. It is far too uncertain that these funds would be replaced by other revenues from State management of federal lands. It is far more likely that cooperative efforts between industry and environmental groups, working with local governments to improve management of National Forests, will result in higher levels of timber harvest and thus higher returns to the counties. Such efforts have succeeded before.
3. **Expensive legal challenges to a lands transfer are certain and would likely succeed.** Any attempt to transfer federal lands to the State will face strong legal opposition. These fights are long and the attorney fees can run into the millions. There is no certainty that Idaho will win. It should invest this money in the cooperative efforts referred to above, which have a far more likely positive return.

Finally, but extremely important to me, my children, and grandchildren, is the real risk that we will lose these lands, especially those having the most value for hunting, fishing, backpacking, and wilderness travel, to private interests. If the State finds in future years that it doesn't have the revenue to properly manage these assets, it will be pressured to sell them to the highest bidder. My concern is shared by many others, and it stems directly from Article IX, Section 8 of the Idaho Constitution, which as you know both requires that state lands be managed for maximum long term financial return and permits the state to sell them at public action. Here is the language that concerns me:

Article IX. Education and School Lands

Section 8. Location and disposition of public lands

It shall be the duty of the state board of land commissioners to provide for the location, protection, sale or rental of all the lands heretofore, or which may hereafter be granted to or acquired by the state by or from the general government, under such regulations as may be prescribed by law, and in such manner as will secure the maximum long term financial return to the institution to which granted or to the state if not specifically granted;

[T]he general grants of land made by congress to the state shall be judiciously located and carefully preserved and held in trust, **subject to disposal at public auction** for the use and benefit of the respective object for which said grants of land were made, and **the legislature shall provide for the sale of said lands** from time to time **and for the sale of timber on all state lands...**

I do not want to see my family's favorite stretches of trout and steelhead water, the high mountain lakes we treasure, or Idaho's best elk and mule deer habitat, sold and fenced and posted with no trespassing signs. They are Idaho's legacy to future generations, yours and my children and grandchildren. You should not believe for a minute that this legacy would be secure if these lands were transferred to the State.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Charles Graham

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