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FEDERAL LANDS**Information on Land Owned
and Acquired**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are pleased to be here today to present information on historical changes in the federal government's ownership of lands. The amount of acreage owned and managed by the federal government and the use of those lands are matters currently of interest to this Subcommittee. The Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) manage about 95 percent of all federal lands. Our testimony provides information on the changes, over the last 30 years, in the amount of acreage managed by these agencies. In addition, as you requested, we are providing preliminary information on the number of acres acquired by these agencies from nonfederal parties during the 30-year period and the means, such as purchase and exchange, by which these acres were acquired. The information we are presenting is based, in part, on our January 1995 report¹ on land ownership as well as preliminary findings of work we are performing to update that report at the request of the Chairman, House Committee on Resources, and Representative Richard Pombo.

In summary,

-- The four agencies were managing a total of about 623 million acres as of September 1994 (end of fiscal year 1994). In comparison, these agencies were managing about 701 million acres at the end of fiscal year 1964. The overall decrease in acres managed between mid-1964 and September, 30 1994--about 78 million acres--occurred primarily as a result of two major transfers of BLM-managed lands to the state of Alaska and Native Alaskans. Excluding these transfers, the total acres managed by the four agencies increased by about 34 million acres as reflected in increases in acreage managed by the Forest Service, the Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

-- Data from the four agencies showed that they acquired title from nonfederal parties to a total of over 10.8 million acres between mid-1964 and September 30, 1994. These lands were acquired primarily through purchase, gift or donation, exchange, and condemnation. Purchases (about 5.1 million acres) and exchanges (about 3.3 million acres) accounted for most of these acquisitions.

BACKGROUND

Each of the four land management agencies has its own mission and responsibilities for the lands and resources under its jurisdiction. BLM and the Forest Service

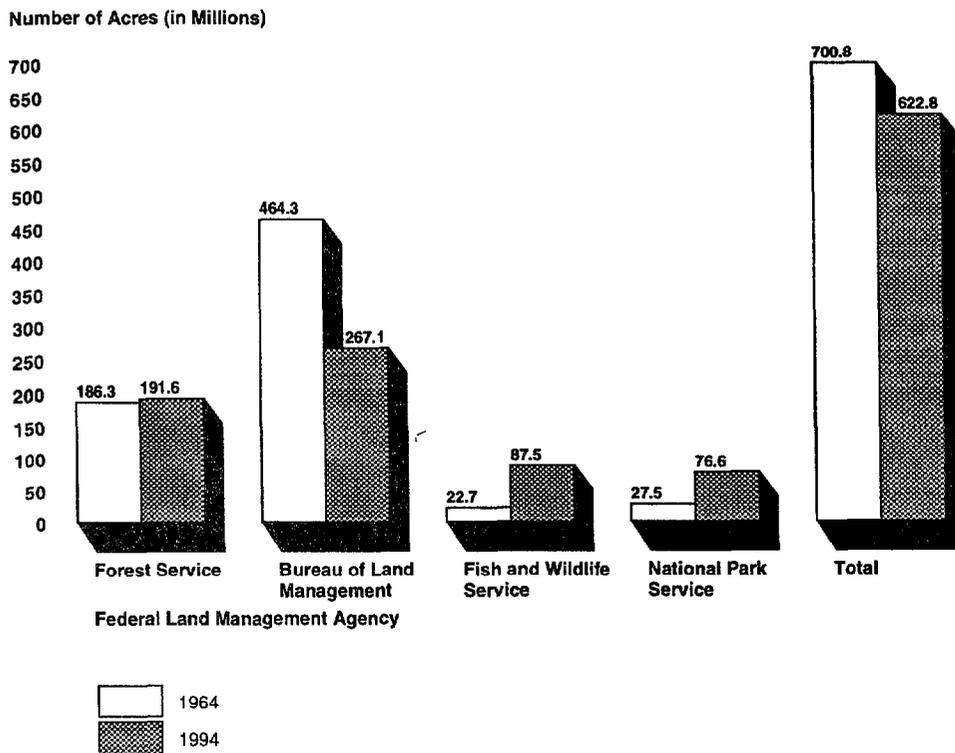
¹Federal Lands: Information on Land Owned and on Acreage With Conservation Restrictions (GAO/RCED-95-73FS, Jan. 30, 1995).

manage lands for a variety of uses including timber harvesting, livestock grazing, mineral production, recreation, and wilderness protection. The National Park Service manages lands to maintain the national park system for the enjoyment of current and future generations. FWS manages lands primarily for the conservation and protection of plant and animal resources.

LANDS MANAGED BY THE FOUR FEDERAL AGENCIES

Of the four federal land management agencies, three--FWS, the Park Service, and the Forest Service--experienced increases in the number of acres they managed over the 30-year period 1964-94. In contrast, the number of acres managed by BLM, the largest agency in terms of acres managed, decreased. A significant portion of the decrease in BLM-managed acres resulted from the land transfers to the state of Alaska and Native Alaskans. In addition to these transfers, BLM also transferred lands to FWS, the Park Service, and the Forest Service. The major transfers involved about 90 million acres to FWS and the Park Service. Changes in acreage managed by these agencies are shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Land Managed by the Four Federal Agencies, Fiscal Years 1964 and 1994

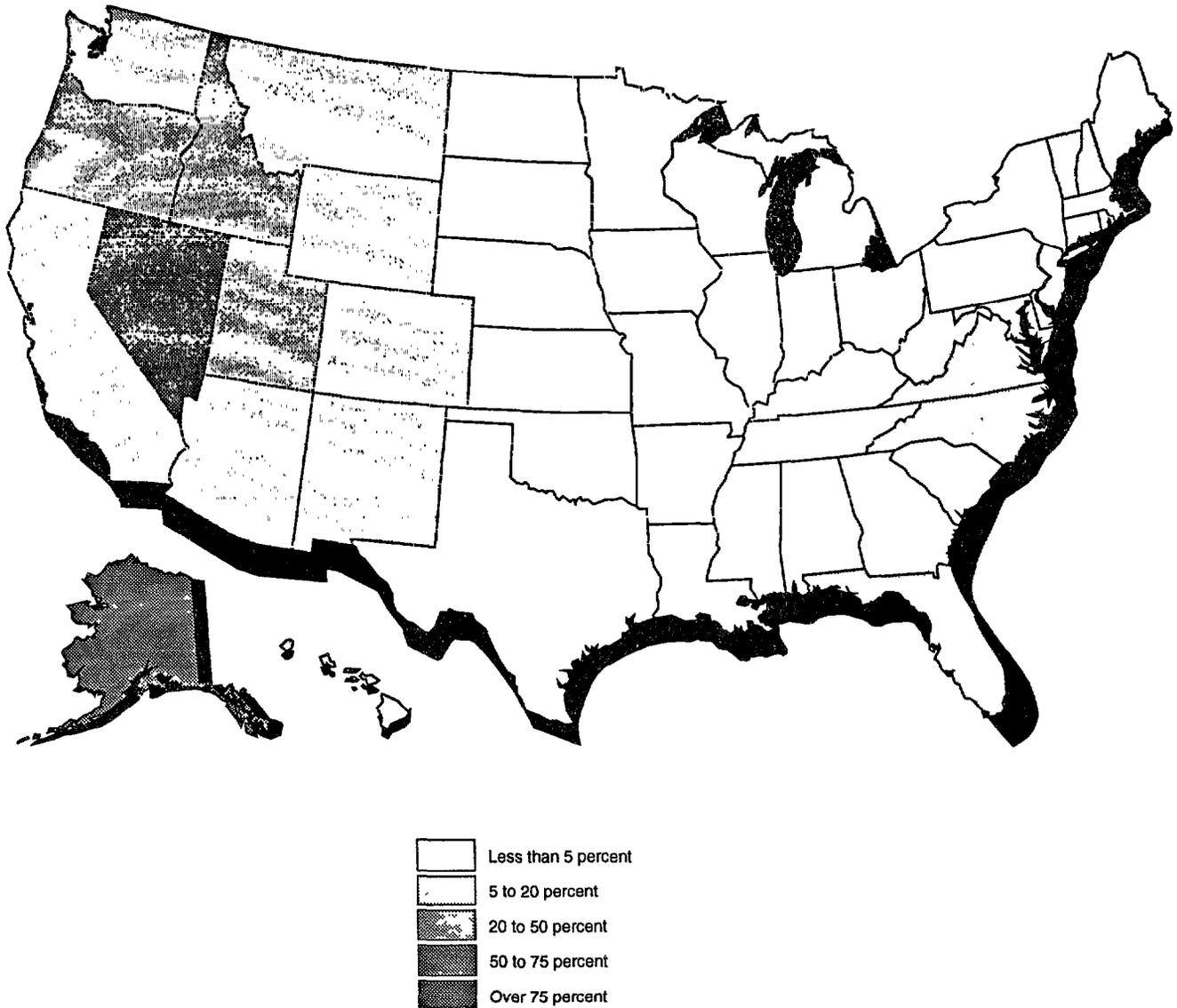


As shown above, the number of acres managed by the Forest Service increased by about 5 million--from 186.3 million to 191.6 million; the number of acres managed by FWS increased by about 65 million--from 22.7 million to 87.5 million; and the number of acres managed by the Park Service increased by about 49 million--from 27.5 million to 76.6 million. During the same 30-year period, the BLM-managed acres decreased from 464.3 million to 267.1 million--a decrease of about 197 million acres. In addition to the significant land transfers to Alaska and Native Alaskans, BLM transferred 49 million acres to FWS in 1979 and 1980 to expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and about 41 million acres to the Park Service in 1979 to expand existing or create new national parks, monuments, and preserves.

The acreage managed by these agencies increased in 46 states and decreased in 4 states--Alaska, Idaho, New Mexico, and Utah--over the 30-year period. For five states--Arizona, California, Florida, Nevada, and Wyoming--the number of acres managed increased by at least 1 million acres over the 30 years.

The proportion of land in each state that is managed by the four agencies also varied, but the concentration of federally managed lands is clearly in the western states, including Alaska. Figure 2 shows the percentage of acres that was managed within each state by the four agencies as of September 30, 1994.

Figure 2: Percentage of Each State's Acreage Managed by Four Federal Agencies as of September 30, 1994



As depicted in figure 2, for most states, the four agencies managed less than 5 percent of the state's land; in 12 states, these agencies managed from 5 to 20 percent of the state's land; in 7 states, the percentage was from 20 to 50; in 4 states, it was from 50 to 75 percent; and for Nevada, the four agencies managed over 75 percent of the acreage within the state. Detailed data on the acreage managed in individual states are provided in appendix I to this statement.

FEDERAL AGENCY ACQUISITIONS OF LAND

Preliminary agency information from our ongoing work shows that over the 1964-94 period, the four agencies acquired title to over 10.8 million acres of land from nonfederal parties. Table 1 shows, for the four agencies, the various means for acquiring lands and the number of acres acquired.

Table 1: Acres Acquired From Nonfederal Parties for the 1964-94 Period

Acquisition by	Acres acquired (thousands)				
	Forest Service	Bureau of Land Management	Fish and Wildlife Service	National Park Service	Total
Purchase	1,479.3	297.1	1,998.2	1,303.3	5,077.9
Exchange	2,179.6	724.4	256.6	90.7	3,251.3
Gift or Donation	522.3	14.6	586.4	631.7	1,755.0
Condemnation	105.1	35.8	35.0	358.8	534.7
Other	0	0	0	242.5	242.5
Total	4,286.3	1,071.9	2,876.2	2,627.0	10,861.4

As the table shows, purchases and exchanges represent the largest portion of the total acres acquired over the 30-year period. Since exchanges are to be made on a value-for-value basis--rather than an acre-for-acre basis--the number of acres exchanged by the agencies can be less than or greater than the number of acres that are acquired.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes our statement. We will be happy to respond to any questions that you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have.

PERCENTAGE OF EACH STATE'S ACREAGE MANAGED BY THE FOUR FEDERAL AGENCIES AS OF SEPTEMBER 30, 1994

State	Total acreage of state ^a	Percentage of acreage managed by					Total federal acreage managed by the four agencies
		Forest Service	Bureau of Land Management	Fish and Wildlife Service	National Park Service	The four federal agencies ^b	
Alabama	33,431,680	1.98	0.33	0.05	0.03	2.40	801,611
Alaska	393,747,200	5.60	22.42	19.38	13.26	60.67	238,874,995
Arizona	72,963,840	15.42	19.54	2.29	3.69	40.94	29,874,028
Arkansas	34,036,480	7.49	0.86	0.88	0.30	9.54	3,246,065
California	101,676,160	20.29	17.02	0.24	4.76	42.30	43,013,642
Colorado	66,624,000	21.76	12.46	0.10	0.89	35.21	23,455,115
Connecticut	3,548,160	0 ^c	0	0.01	0.18	0.19	6,759
Delaware	1,534,080	0	0	1.56	0	1.56	23,968
Florida	38,392,320	2.96	0.07	0.63	6.36	10.02	3,845,884
Georgia	37,745,280	2.29	0	1.25	0.15	3.69	1,393,406
Hawaii	4,133,760	0 ^c	0	6.97	6.20	13.17	544,462
Idaho	53,487,360	38.23	22.15	0.09	0.19	60.65	32,439,588
Illinois	36,059,520 ^d	0.76	0 ^c	0.19	0 ^c	0.95	342,631
Indiana	23,158,400 ^d	0.83	0	0.03	0.06	0.92	214,176
Iowa	36,016,640	0	0 ^c	0.11	0 ^c	0.12	41,611
Kansas	52,660,480	0.21	0 ^c	0.05	0 ^c	0.26	137,426
Kentucky	25,863,040	2.65	0	0.01	0.36	3.02	780,705
Louisiana	31,776,000	1.90	0.97	1.40	0.04	4.31	1,368,834
Maine	21,594,240	0.25	0	0.21	0.33	0.78	169,216
Maryland	7,870,080	0	0	0.51	0.75	1.26	98,993
Massachusetts	5,914,240	0	0	0.21	0.90	1.11	65,580
Michigan	37,448,320 ^d	7.62	0.20	0.30	1.84	9.96	3,731,491
Minnesota	54,014,080 ^d	5.23	0.28	0.79	0.43	6.73	3,637,840
Mississippi	30,903,040	3.74	0.19	0.63	0.33	4.89	1,510,381

State	Total acreage of state ^a	Percentage of acreage managed by					Total federal acreage managed by the four agencies
		Forest Service	Bureau of Land Management	Fish and Wildlife Service	National Park Service	The four federal agencies ^b	
Missouri	44,613,760	3.34	0.01	0.11	0.15	3.60	1,605,889
Montana	94,109,440	17.92	8.58	0.65	1.30	28.45	26,773,255
Nebraska	49,522,560	0.71	0.02	0.33	0.01	1.07	528,145
Nevada	70,762,880	8.22	67.77	3.24	1.10	80.33	56,846,081
New Hampshire	5,941,120	12.17	0	0.05	0.16	12.39	735,995
New Jersey	5,257,600	0	0	1.06	0.92	1.98	104,222
New Mexico	77,822,720	11.98	16.56	0.42	0.49	29.46	22,927,727
New York	32,056,320 ^d	0.04	0	0.07	0.15	0.27	86,663
North Carolina	33,710,080	3.68	0	1.19	1.09	5.97	2,011,072
North Dakota	45,250,560	2.44	0.14	1.02	0.16	3.76	1,699,378
Ohio	26,450,560 ^d	0.83	0	0.03	0.10	0.96	254,371
Oklahoma	44,737,920	0.67	0.01	0.22	0.02	0.92	412,975
Oregon	62,139,520	25.20	25.31	0.85	0.31	51.68	32,113,362
Pennsylvania	28,806,400 ^d	1.78	0	0.03	0.23	2.04	588,805
Rhode Island	787,840	0	0	0.19	0 ^e	0.19	1,499
South Carolina	19,960,960	3.06	0	0.55	0.13	3.75	747,591
South Dakota	49,357,440	4.08	0.57	0.39	0.31	5.34	2,637,349
Tennessee	26,972,800	2.34	0	0.17	1.29	3.79	1,023,461
Texas	171,057,280	0.44	0	0.22	0.69	1.35	2,312,283
Utah	54,338,560	14.92	40.80	0.19	3.85	59.75	32,467,853
Vermont	6,153,600	5.76	0	0.10	0.16	6.02	370,453
Virginia	27,088,640	6.09	0	0.43	1.19	7.72	2,090,328
Washington	45,207,680	20.29	0.78	0.30	4.30	25.67	11,603,057
West Virginia	15,508,480	6.66	0	0.01	0.33	7.00	1,085,401
Wisconsin	35,932,800 ^d	4.23	0.45	0.52	0.38	5.58	2,003,680
Wyoming	62,604,160	14.79	29.38	0.09	3.82	48.08	30,102,224
Total	2,340,750,080	8.18	11.41	3.74	3.27	26.60	622,751,526

^aSource: Bureau of Census, Department of Commerce, 1990 Census data.

^bPercentage may not add because of rounding.

^cAlthough the agency managed land in this state, the amount managed is less than 0.005 percent of the state's acreage.

^dTotal acreage shown for this state does not include Great Lakes water area.

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