



IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA

USDA Forest Service
SRS Comments
Lands 4S
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Mailstop 1124
Washington, DC 20250-0003

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Via email: SRS_Land_Sales@fs.fed.us

Dear Forest Service Staff:

The following comments on the Secure Rural Schools Land Sales Initiative come from the Izaak Walton League of America. The League is a nonprofit conservation organization that since its founding in 1922 has worked on a host of public lands conservation issues. The League has 40,000 members nationally in over 300 local chapters around the country that work on conservation locally, regionally, and nationally. League members are hunters, anglers, and others who enjoy the outdoors.

While the League supports adequate funding for rural schools, the League opposes the proposal to sell our nation's public lands, and National Forest lands in particular, in order to pay for rural schools.

The League has long supported retention of public lands for the public. These lands provide wildlife habitat, recreational activities such as hiking and wildlife viewing, and high quality lands for hunting and fishing.

The scattered parcels selected for the Secure Rural Schools Land Sales Initiative provide many of these values. Some of these parcels are all the more valuable because they are separated from other federal ownerships, and may be the best lands in that vicinity to provide habitat or recreation in a sea of private ownership or development pressures. In other instances, National Forest parcels may be separated from other federal ownerships but still lie within other publicly-owned lands. To sell such a parcel would lead to a private development inholding that fragments public ownership.

For example, the SRS Land Sales Initiative proposes to sell 21,566 acres of National Forest land in Missouri in the Mark Twain National Forest. The Mark Twain

Forest itself is split into many smaller pieces across 29 counties of southern Missouri, due in part to its relatively late formation in 1939. Missouri's only national forest, the Mark Twain encompasses roughly 1.5 million acres, mostly within the Ozark Highlands. Located across southern and central Missouri, Mark Twain National Forest has the largest base of public land open to the public. Selling these lands would deprive the public of a huge amount of public land in a state where concern for conservation and the need for public lands are high. These lands should not be sold.

In particular, on the Cedar Creek Ranger District of the Mark Twain National Forest, there are approximately 200 acres of land proposed for sale that are directly adjacent to or nearby the T. S. Baskett Research and Educational Area operated by the University of Missouri. On that property, Dr. Steve Pallardy, forestry professor, with Dr. Gene Garrett, garnered funds from Congress to begin a long-range carbon sequestration project that relates to global climate change. There is a multi-million-dollar monitoring tower on this land and any potential development of nearby Forest Service parcels now proposed for sale would alter that research. One of the Forest Service parcels up for sale would be accessed directly through the research site. Again, these lands on the Mark Twain National Forest should not be sold.

In the Superior National Forest in Minnesota, as another example, all of the lands proposed for sale in the Gunflint Ranger District have high value due to their location and connection with state lands. All of these parcels proposed for sale in this ranger district are either surrounded by state land or adjacent to state lands, either Judge C. R. Magney State Park or Grand Portage State Forest. These lands have huge value for wildlife habitat and recreation, and should not be sold, either.

In California, as yet another example, the SRS Land Sales Initiative proposes to sell 79,825 acres of National Forest land, the largest amount of land targeted for sale in any state. But in a state like California, with burgeoning population and development pressures, the value of these public lands remaining in federal ownership will only increase with time. These lands, too, should not be sold.

For these reasons, the Izaak Walton League of America opposes the Secure Rural Schools Land Sales Initiative, and urges the U. S. Forest Service and the other federal land managing agencies to retain their lands for the long-term benefit of the public and the preservation of natural resource values that these lands contain.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

Sincerely,

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