NAR Issue Summaries

Environment / Transfer of Public Lands

NAR Committee:

Land Use, Property Rights and Environment Committee

What is the fundamental issue?

Public lands, at the most basic level, are lands that are held and administered by the government, whether it be federal, state, or local. They are maintained for the use and enjoyment of the public and offer a multitude of benefits that are vital for the environment, economy, and society. Some of these benefits include:

Recreation and Health - Public lands provide outdoor spaces for hiking, camping and wildlife viewing.

Economic Value - Public lands add value to the economy because they attract industry and businesses that are able to extract value from the land, such as livestock grazing or a guiding service.

Conservation - Public lands play a crucial role in preserving natural landscapes and ecosystems, which are home to diverse species of flora and fauna.

Cultural and Historic Preservation - Public lands protect sites that have historic, cultural or archeological importance.

Scientific Research - Public lands serve as living laboratories where scientists can conduct research on ecosystems, climate change and conservation methods.

Climate Change Mitigation - By preserving forests and other ecosystems, public lands play a role in carbon sequestration and help mitigate the effects of climate change.

Public lands are a shared resource that provide ecological, economic, and social benefits, contributing to the well-being of communities and the nation.

I am a real estate professional. What does this mean for my business?

Facilitating the efficient sale and transfer of public lands could provide business opportunities for Realtors in many real estate markets.

NAR Policy:

Federal Ownership of Real Property

NAR believes that current government real property acquisition practices have resulted in excessive amounts of private property being placed in the government estate. Federal agencies have been authorized by Congress to acquire private property, but may not be provided with the resources necessary

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to promptly compensate landowners or adequately manage and maintain acquired properties.

Congress should reform the current federal property acquisition policy which has resulted in large-scale acquisition authorizations without timely appropriation of funds for actual purchase. Any new acquisition of property by the federal government should include timeline limits for appropriation and compensation, a management plan approved prior to purchase for maintaining the property, and transaction transparency measures such as prompt and direct notifications to property owners who may be impacted by the acquisition.

Furthermore, the federal government should conduct a thorough inventory of its real property assets and dispose of those properties which exceed government needs. This should include an examination of and update to existing laws and policies that create unnecessary roadblocks and conflicts to a responsible and simplified property disposal program.

Every federal agency holding real property should participate in this inventory and utilize private sector expertise in appraising, marketing, and liquidation of property. An aggressive, responsible, and simplified real property disposal program, involving the private sector in transacting sales, will reduce federal property management costs, increase private property ownership opportunities, and help reduce our national debt.

This policy was current as of the NAR 2020 Mid-Year Board of Directors Meeting.

Public Lands Management

NAR supports the management, protection, and sustainable use of public lands by promoting laws, regulations, policies, guidance and practices.

NAR encourages protection of property rights, sustainable resource use, long-term conservation and ecosystem protection, public access and recreation, science-based management, and local input and decision-making.

This policy was current as of the NAR 2025 Annual Convention.

Opposition Arguments:

More land should be made public because of all the vast economic, energy, environment, cultural and natural resource benefits that accrue to the country.

Legislative/Regulatory Status/Outlook

The Department of Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Scott Turner have announced a Joint Task Force on using underutilized federal land suitable for housing to increase supply and decrease costs for millions of Americans. The Interior Department oversees more than 500 million acres of federal land, much of it suitable for residential use. The Department of Housing and Urban Development brings expertise in housing policy and community development. Together, the Task Force on Federal Land for Housing will help to increase housing supply and decrease costs for millions of

Americans.

Under this agreement, HUD will pinpoint where housing needs are most pressing and guide the process by working with state and local leaders who know their communities best. Interior will identify locations that can support homes while carefully considering environmental impact and land-use restrictions. Working together, the agencies can take inventory of underused federal properties, transfer or lease them to states or localities to address housing needs, and support the infrastructure required to make development viable -- all while ensuring affordability remains at the core of the mission.

Streamlining regulatory and permitting procedures is a cornerstone of this partnership. Historically, building on federal land is a nightmare of red tape -- lengthy environmental reviews, complex transfer protocols and disjointed agency priorities. This partnership will cut through the bureaucracy. Interior will reduce the red tape behind land transfers or leases to public housing authorities, nonprofits and local governments. HUD will ensure these projects align with affordability goals and development needs. However, this isn't a free-for-all to build on federal lands - it's a strategic effort to use resources responsibly while preserving our most beautiful lands.

Current Legislation/Regulation (bill number or regulation)

N/A

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