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Public Lands in the State of Nevada: An Overview

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Overview of Public Lands

Almost one-third of total U.S. land acreage is administered by the federal government with the largest acreage found in the thirteen western states¹. In 1999, approximately 92.3 percent of federally managed land acreage was located in the thirteen western states. Contrasting this figure with their proportionate share of national acreage, which is 49 percent, shows the importance that public land management decisions have on the economies and local government fiscal balances of these western states.

The U.S. Department of Interior (2001) reports that the proportionate share of federal lands to total acreage in the thirteen western states varies from 15.1 percent in Hawaii to 82.9 percent in Nevada. For the eleven contiguous western states, approximately 47 percent of total acreage is federally administered. Alaska, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon and Utah have over 50 percent of their land mass federally administered. It should also be noted that these western states have state lands that expand the acreage that can be classified as public.

During the summer of 2000, a questionnaire was administered to all seventeen counties in Nevada to estimate county acreage by federal, state and local governments and private ownership. Results of that questionnaire show that approximately 84 percent of Nevada's acreage is federally administered while only 0.35 percent is under state government administration. Approximately 12.84 percent of total state acreage is under local government administration or private property. The Nevada counties of Nye, Esmeralda, Lander, Lincoln and White Pine have over 90 percent of total county acreage administered by the federal government. Accordingly, Nevada counties that have extensive public lands may find their local economies and fiscal balances influenced considerably by federal land management decisions. Storey County had the largest proportionate share of total county acreage that was classified as either local government or private

property at 90.27 percent. For the metropolitan counties of Clark and Washoe, approximately 8 and 27 percent of total county acreage respectively are administered by local government and/or classified as private property.

A comparison of Tables 1 and 2 show total state of Nevada acreage values that are somewhat different. This may be due to two different sources of information. Table 1's data source is the U.S. Department of the Interior while Table 2 was derived from individual Nevada County Clerk's offices.

Another way view proportionate ownership or administration of Nevada lands is that Nevada is the seventh largest state in the nation. However, only 13 percent of the land is not administered by the federal or state government. This 13 percent which is controlled by local governments or private property owners makes Nevada the tenth smallest state in the nation. (State of Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, 1982).

Table 1. Total Land and Federal Acreage in Thirteen Western States, 1999.

State	Total Acreage	Federal Lands	Percentage of Total Acreage Which Is Federal
	acres	acres	(%)
Alaska	365,481,600	250,280,759.4	68.5
Arizona	72,688,000	32,388,814.9	44.6
California	100,206,720	43,713,266.5	43.6
Colorado	66,485,760	24,239,406.6	36.5
Hawaii	4,105,600	618,327.3	15.1
Idaho	52,933,120	33,078,707.6	62.5
Montana	93,271,040	25,782,663.7	27.6
Nevada	70,264,320	58,226,015.6	82.9
New Mexico	77,766,400	26,625,967.5	34.2
Oregon	61,598,720	32,314,759.4	52.5
Utah	52,696,960	34,005,401.2	64.5
Washington	42,693,760	12,152,494.1	28.5
Wyoming	62,343,040	31,071,152.2	49.8
TOTAL	1,122,535,040	604,497,736.0	53.9
Eleven Contiguous Western States	752,947,840	353,598,649.3	47.0
United States	2,271,343,360	652,550,493.1	28.7

Source: USDI. Bureau of Land Management. Public Land Statistics 1999. Washington, D.C. March 2000

Because public lands are administered by higher levels of government, such as federal and state, local governments cannot legally tax these lands. In order to compensate local governments for loss of revenue due to public lands, the U.S. Congress passed several acts to compensate local governments (See Table 3). Former U.S. Bureau of Land Management Director, Jim Baca, said “while federal government lands provide important local recreational and economic opportunities, their tax exempt status can have fiscal impacts on the governmental units that surround them. These payments are beneficial to local governments, especially for sparsely populated counties that contain large acreage of tax exempt federal lands. These payments help provide vital services, such as fire and police protection, search and rescue operations and road construction.” Table 3 also lists two Nevada State acts that provide income from various state agencies. A comprehensive listing, discussion and historical time series of federal government land-based payments is presented in a referenced study by Zimmerman and Harris (2000).

Several programs exist that provide revenue to government agencies resulting from economic activity on federal lands. For example, payments are made to states from the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service based on revenues from mineral extraction, grazing fees, timber sales and various other land-

based activities. Table 4 lists the major acts and resulting payments to Nevada during fiscal year 1999. The federal payments from the eight acts outlined in Table 4 totaled approximately \$18 million to the state of Nevada. Approximately \$10.0 million were from the Mineral Lease Revenue Act and Payment in Lieu of Taxes. A few acts provide revenue specifically to a branch of government or government service, such as schools or roads, while others are transferred to the county or state level with freedom to spend the revenues on any government purpose that they choose.

Table 2. Federal and State Lands in Nevada

County	Total Federal		Indian Res.		State Government		Local Government and Private		Total Acreage
	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	
Carson City	59,574	60.84%	676	.69%	5,591	5.71%	32,079	32.76%	97,920
Churchill	2,663,053	83.74%	50,309	1.60%	8,175	0.26%	452,782	14.40%	3,144,320
Clark	4,611,372	89.13%	79,676	1.54%	63,637	1.23%	170,435	8.09%	5,173,760
Douglas	247,818	51.56%	60,705	12.63%	1,634	.34%	170,435	35.46%	480,640
Elko	7,862,026	71.5%	164,938	1.5%	26,390	.24%	2,942,487	26.76%	10,995,840
Esmeralda	2,257,154	98.79%	0	0.00%	4,341	0.19%	23,076	1.01%	2,284,800
Eureka	2,126,463	79.45%	0	0.00%	6,423	0.24%	543,593	20.31%	2,676,480
Humboldt	4,961,616	79.89%	27,948	0.45%	8,074	0.13%	1,212,922	19.53%	6,210,560
Lander	3,265,396	90.77%	719	0.02%	360	0.01%	331,324	9.21%	3,597,440
Lincoln	6,699,446	98.29%	0	0.00%	19,805	0.28%	97,469	1.43%	6,816,000
Lyon	894,446	69.05%	52,452	4.05%	21,672	1.68%	326,560	25.21%	1,295,360
Mineral	1,972,402	80.32%	219,783	8.95%	29,714	1.21%	233,781	9.52%	2,455,680
Nye	10,712,385	92.66%	9,249	0.08%	20,810	0.18%	818,516	7.08%	11,560,960
Pershing	2,937,338	76.10%	0	0%	1,930	.05%	920,572	23.85%	3,859,840
Storey	16,315	9.73%	0	0%	0	0.00%	151,362	90.27%	167,680
Washoe	2,701,562	63.88%	345,942	8.18%	19,031	0.45%	116,258	27.49%	4,229,120
White Pine	5,330,462	93.53%	70,670	1.24%	9,119	0.16%	288,949	5.07%	5,699,200
State Total	59,288,828	83.81%	1,083,077	1.53%	246,076	0.35%	9,080,725	12.84%	70,754,600

Table 3. Nevada State Land Payments

Provisions of Law	Agency Making Payment	Types of Receipts	Disposition of Receipts
NRS 322.003	Nevada State Lands	Income from the lease of State Lands, buoys & piers.	State General Fund
NRS 407.0762	Nevada Division of Parks	Revenues from user fees, concessions and grazing fees	Special "State Parks" account to be used only to repair and maintain state parks

Table 4. Fiscal Year 1999 Federal Land Payments to Nevada.

Mineral Lease Revenue	\$2,838,971
Department of Interior (PILT)	\$7,180,805
Department of Energy (PETT)	\$5,729,000
Forest Service Receipts	\$274,519
Taylor Grazing Act	\$290,683
Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act	\$1,661,176
Santini-Burton Act	\$0
Refuge Revenue Sharing	\$162,140
TOTAL	\$18,118,549

Source: State of Nevada, Office of the State Controller, General Ledger Trial Balance Sheets.
USDA, U.S. Forest Service, Region 4 Office, 25% Report, Payments to States 1999.
USDI, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, FY 99 payments Counties, Refuge Revenue Sharing Act.
USDI, BLM Public Land Statistics, 1999. Individual county contacts for Nuclear Waste Policy Act, 1999.

FOOTNOTE

1 The eleven contiguous western states are Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. Hawaii and Alaska are the other two states included in the thirteen western states.

REFERENCES

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