

Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society Position Statement: Federal Land Transfer to State Management/Ownership

The transfer of federally-owned and -managed public lands to state ownership or management is likely to hinder science-based wildlife management efforts, reduce hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation opportunities, and erode the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (Organ et al. 2012). For these reasons and as detailed below, the Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society is opposed to the transfer of management authority and/or ownership of Idaho's federal lands to the state.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation was described by and defined during the meeting of the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in 2001. Subsequently, The Wildlife Society published a technical review of the model which is actively promoted by The Boone and Crockett Club (Organ et al 2012). The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is a successful wildlife management framework that serves as a template for other nations to guide wildlife management strategies. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is based upon several key principles:

- Wildlife resources are a public trust,
- There is no market hunting of wildlife for commercial sale,
- The allocation of wildlife is conducted by law,
- Wildlife can be killed only for a legitimate purpose,
- Wildlife are considered an international resource,
- Science is the proper tool for the discharge of wildlife policy, and
- There is a democracy of hunting.

The federal management of lands throughout the United States, particularly in Idaho and other western states, directly supports several important pillars of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation as a means of managing wildlife populations. State ownership or management is unlikely to provide continued or commensurate support for this framework.

The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management collectively manage over 32 million acres of land and 1,100 miles of river in Idaho (USBLM 2016). These lands are heavily used for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation as well as the exercise of treaty-reserved rights by American Indian tribes. These lands also contribute to the economic stability of the state, generating over 1 billion dollars in economic output and over 11,000 jobs in Idaho (USBLM 2016). The responsible, science-based management of these vast lands and resources, to provide these and other opportunities, is expensive. The management of these lands is conducted through the efforts of hundreds of professional-level employees supplemented by a small army of volunteers, including over 700 youth. These individuals include a vast array of highly-trained wildlife and fisheries biologists, forest and rangeland ecologists, hydrologists, soil scientists, and others dedicated to the responsible, science-based stewardship of Idaho's public lands and resources. Cost estimates for firefighting alone in several western states have met or surpassed large percentages of individual state budgets. For example, firefighting costs in Wyoming currently make up approximately 54% of the US Forest Service's congressionally designated discretionary funds (Y2 Consultants LLC 2016).

If management responsibilities shift to the states, there will likely be a reduction in the quality and scale of management. States are generally ill-positioned financially to support resource stewardship and a large, diverse, and highly-trained workforce over broad geographic areas. Some states, including Idaho,

are constitutionally-bound to secure the maximum long-term financial return from generally-held state lands. As a result, states, including Idaho, may explore a variety of cost-cutting and revenue-generating measures, including actions such as commercial leasing, redevelopment, or direct privatization of lands presently held in the public trust. Such actions would fundamentally harm application of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation in Idaho through an erosion of, science-based management, recreational opportunities, and the democracy of hunting itself.

The efficiency and effectiveness of federal land management has been extensively debated for years. Funding to address the identified inefficiencies has declined over time, further exacerbating resource concerns and intensifying the debate. Many projects are now completed only through collaborative efforts involving federal and state agencies, county and local jurisdictions, American Indian tribes, private landowners and businesses, leasees of federal lands, non-governmental organizations, and other groups. The success of these collaborative efforts across multiple jurisdictional boundaries is due in large part to the professionally and science driven leadership of the federal government.

The position of the Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society is to:

- 1) Strongly oppose any and all efforts to shift management authority over federal lands to the State of Idaho, County or local jurisdictions, private corporations, or individuals.
- 2) Strongly oppose any and all efforts to divest the American public and Idahoans of their lands, now under federal management, for the benefit of the State of Idaho, private corporations, or individuals.
- 3) Strongly state that all lands currently under federal management shall remain under federal management to maximize the benefits of these lands to wildlife, science, and society as a whole.
- 4) Support federal and state funding at levels necessary for effective habitat and wildlife conservation.
- 5) Support the continued development of collaborative wildlife conservation-related projects, including conservation based land exchanges, at the local, state, and regional levels to improve wildlife populations and habitats for the benefit and enjoyment of all citizens.
- 6) Support the dissemination of information regarding the benefits of federal ownership and management of public lands to all United States citizens, regardless of their area of residence.
- 7) Support the continued participation of local residents in land management process through the communication of science-based information, particularly in areas where federally-managed lands make up a large proportion of the landscape.
- 8) Recognize that federal land management can and should be improved through careful consideration of the best available science, the proper allocation of necessary resources, openness and clarity of actions, and continued support for the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

Literature Cited

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