

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

November 6, 2009

The Honorable Gene Dodaro,  
Acting Comptroller General of the United States  
Comptroller General  
Government Accountability Office (GAO)  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

According to some sources, the federal land management agencies oversee an estate of 671 million acres. Although numerous provisions of law require the federal government to inventory its land, existing inventories are old, outdated, and incompatible between agencies, making an accurate federal inventory difficult if not impossible. The outdated and inconsistent data create numerous problems and raise serious questions regarding the accuracy of federal land ownership and use. For example, data from the US General Services Administration shows that the percentage of federally owned land changed in almost every single state between 2003 and 2004 (the most recent data available), in some states by more than 50%. The problems and variability of these data raise many concerns for legislators with oversight responsibilities on federal land use policy.

Along with inaccurate acreage totals, agencies often cannot accurately identify the specific boundaries of the land they administer. This leads to many encroachment issues and boundary adjustments which are costly and time consuming. For example, timber sales on government land have encroached on private land resulting in claims against the Government and, conversely, timber sales on private land have encroached on federal lands requiring investigation and claims against private landowners.

To address this situation, we are writing to request that the General Accounting Office (GAO) update several reports regarding the status of federal lands. We believe the following three reports could be incorporated into one comprehensive analysis of federal land ownership and its uses:

- GAO/RCED-95-73 FS Federal Lands: Information on Land Owned and on Acreage with Conservation Restrictions (January 1995);
- GAO/RCED-96-40 Land Ownership: Information on the Acreage, Management and Use of Federal and Other Lands (March 1996); and,
- GAO/RCED-96-139 R Federal Land Use.

In updating these reports, please report on the revenue generated for fiscal years 1996-2009 from the following activities on federal land including:

- bonus bids, rents, and royalties;
- claim maintenance and location fees;
- special use permit or 'rights-of-way' fees for transmission lines, water projects, solar, and wind projects;
- filing and other fees including those monies collected under cost recovery regulations;
- the value of the reclamation bonds held by the respective land management agencies; and,
- corporate taxes paid by companies operating on federal lands and waters by sector.

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For comparison sake please report on the revenue generated for fiscal years 1996-2009 from:

- recreation, entrance and use fees;
- special use permit fees generated from wilderness hunting camps or similar activities; and,
- Park Concession receipts.

We also request that you identify federal acreage designated as critical habitat; federal acreage with international designations such as the United Nation's Biosphere Reserve Program, World Heritage Sites, Ramsar sites or "Wetlands of International Importance;" acreage involved in the land transactions of the three nonprofit organizations described in GAO/RCED-96-40; and, acres acquired by federal agencies that facilitated the establishment of buffer areas around military reservations versus acreage which expanded national parks, wilderness areas, battlegrounds, wildlife refuges, national recreation areas or similarly designated acres.

In addition, please identify any lands added to the federal estate through use of the eminent domain powers of the federal government or state and local governments and institutions. Acreages available for federal timber sales, acres burned by year as a result of forest fires, and federal costs associated with the federal land fires.


Please include the percentage of the federal mineral estate that has been segregated or withdrawn from mineral entry under the general mining law of the United States as codified in chapters 2, 12, 12A, 15, and 16 of title 30, United States Code, and in sections 161 and 162 of such title; under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920; the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands of 1946; and, the Mineral Materials Disposal Act of 1947. Please specify what lands (acres) have been removed to protect the military mission at military bases and infrastructure such as federal highways. Please include the amount of acres managed by the Department of Defense and identify those bases with energy or mineral development programs and projects.

Finally, please identify how many acres under a mineral lease or subject to a mining claim are under a notice or permit and have surface disturbance and what percentage has been reclaimed v. what is under lease or claim and undisturbed. Please identify acres managed by DOI's Bureau of Reclamation, and any energy or mineral development and production taking place on wildlife refuges and the ownership of the mineral estate being developed.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

  
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Doc Hastings  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Natural Resources

  
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Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Energy & Natural  
Resources