

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

Witness Statement

Testimony on H.R. 2950 by Dennis Reynolds

Chairman Hansen, and members of the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, my name is Dennis Reynolds. I am the County Judge for Grant County, Oregon. I am here today testifying in support of H.R. 2950, the Oregon Land Exchange Act of 1999. I support these land exchanges because of the benefits that they afford all parties, especially the citizens of Grant County, who I represent here today.

The two primary reasons I support these exchanges are:

- 1) These exchanges make managerial sense because they consolidate properties of both agency-managed public lands and private land ownership which results in both public and private managerial efficiencies.
- 2) The exchanges make sense because they remove agency-managed public lands from within the boundaries of private lands. With no legal access, these agency-managed public lands within the geographic boundaries of privately owned lands are an attractive nuisance for the private land owner and, therefore, a potential liability. The public constantly seeks ways to assert access rights to these inaccessible lands which they feel they are entitled to access for personal use. These exchanges will remove this problem for the lands being considered in this exchange.

Other than these two primary reasons for my support, I see several secondary factors that contribute to my support:

- 1) There is potential for the release of previously and currently unavailable raw material to the lumber manufactures in Grant County. This may assist these employers, who are currently struggling to survive economically, in their ability to sustain employment capacity through these times of uncertain markets and limited raw material supply. This may keep the lumber manufactures in Grant County economically viable until Federal Timber Management problems can be resolved.
- 2) The exchanges have virtually no negative impact to private water rights currently held in Grant County.
- 3) There will be a positive impact to the tax base within Grant County. One of the criteria the Grant County Court gave to Clearwater Land Exchange when they came to us for support in 1995 was that there be no net loss of tax base to the county. They have worked to honor that commitment and I applaud their efforts. This would not be the case if the United States Government were to purchase these lands. I believe the land exchange program is the logical tool to achieve public benefits without a devastating effect to the local economies of Western United States and private landowners.

The land exchanges proposed in H.R. 2950 will result in a net gain of nearly 14,000 private acres to Grant County's tax base. This is a "win" for the county taxpayers and a "win" for the public that receives the amenities that they desire.

I realize the benefits associated with public acquisition of fish and wildlife habitat is the driving force for most people who support these exchanges. However, as an elected leader of nearly 8,000 citizens in Grant County my first responsibility is to look out for their well being. I feel these land exchanges support my responsibilities to those citizens.

The exchanges are a "win" for the citizens of Grant County by protecting their Water Rights, increasing their Tax Base and attempting to bolster the sagging timber base for the major employers of the County.

The exchanges are a "win" for those people who feel habitat for threatened and endangered species of fish and wildlife is more appropriately managed by federal agencies.

They are a "win" for the private landowners who can finally consolidate their ownerships and take control of the scattered public held tracts of land that have continually led to social conflict.

Finally, they are a "win" for federal agencies through the consolidation of their management boundaries. This will facilitate more efficient expenditure of public management funds. This is important at a time when agency budgets never go far enough to provide appropriate and timely management of public lands.

I encourage you to support this legislation. I understand some of the landowners that have offered lands into this exchange are running out of patience and are looking to other options for their lands. If this happens and the exchange falls through, we all lose. I urge you to support H.R. 2950 and help protect the benefits I have presented in my testimony.

I want to thank Congressman Walden for introducing this legislation. I would also like to thank this committee and Chairman Hansen for inviting me to testify on this issue of importance to Grant County.

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