

Statement of Rep. J.D. Hayworth

Committee on Resources

Forests and Forest Health Subcommittee Hearing on H.R. 4919, the Tonto and Coconino National Forests Land Exchange Act

Thursday, June 20, 2002

Mr. Chairman, H.R. 4919, the Tonto and Coconino National Forests Land Exchange Act authorizes, directs and expedites two land exchanges in the Tonto and Coconino National Forests in Arizona: the Montezuma Castle/Payson Airport Land Exchange and the Diamond Point Land Exchange.

The legislation authorizes the Forest Service to enter into equal-value land swaps to acquire a 157-acre parcel of private land to enhance and protect the Montezuma Castle National Monument, as well as a 143-acre open meadow wildlife habitat known as Double Cabin Park. Both parcels are in the Coconino National Forest.

In exchange, approximately 221 acres of national forest property adjoining the Town of Payson municipal airport would be acquired. The property is held by the Montezuma Castle Land Exchange Joint Venture (MCLEJV), an Arizona partnership of local residents formed to promote economic development. The Town of Payson has entered into an agreement with MCLEJV to purchase a portion of the property to create private sector business development and job opportunities.

Payson is totally surrounded by national forest lands, virtually land-locking the community. Local officials feel that the lack of land for industry and low-cost housing is the major obstacle to economic development in the region.

The legislation also authorizes the Forest Service to acquire a 495-acre parcel known as the Q Ranch, which is currently owned by The Conservation Fund. In exchange, the Diamond Point Summer Homes Association will acquire 108 acres of federal land that has been occupied by the group's 45 residential cabins since the 1950's.

The Tonto National Forest Plan specifically recommends conveyance of the federal land. The exchange will transfer land of limited public use to the association in exchange for private lands that will increase management efficiency and enhance public access, use and enjoyment of the surrounding national forest lands.

I again reference last week's Resources hearing on "Analysis Paralysis" in explaining the need for these exchanges to be accomplished by means of a legislative fix. These two exchanges have been pending for more than 6 years, with no conclusion anywhere in sight. In fact, Mr. Chairman, you will be interested to know that since the Diamond Point land exchange began the administrative process on the Tonto National Forest, ***4 of the 45 homeowners have died.***

This is common-sense legislation that accomplishes goals that even the Forest Service has stated are a priority. These land exchanges are endorsed by the Gila County Board of Supervisors, the Rim County Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Town of Payson, the Payson Regional Economic Development Corporation, and the National Park Service, among others.

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