

Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Reauthorization Act of 2015

Background and Section-by-Section

Background:

Initially authorized in 2000, the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Reauthorization Act allows the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to sell lands marked for disposal and retain the proceeds to buy high value private or state parcels encumbered by other federal lands. Over the life of its previous authorization, which expired in 2011, the BLM sold nearly 27,000 acres of surplus lands. It then used the proceeds to purchase approximately 18,000 acres and cover associated administrative expenses. The program allows for meaningful conservation of high value land from truly willing sellers, but without spending taxpayer money and without growing federal land coffers.

Section-by-Section:

Section 1—Expands the definition of “exceptional resource” (the term describing what land can be targeted for acquisition using FLTFA proceeds) to include land acquired for “recreational access and use, or other recreational value.”

Sections 2 and 3—Ensures that any land marked for disposal by the BLM qualifies for sale, and that proceeds can be used to buy state or private land within any federal area (e.g., National Park or National Forest). Under the 2000 authorization, only land marked for disposal prior to 2000 was eligible for sale, and acquisition could only target land encumbered by federal areas established as of 2000. Section 3 also requires a public, online database of lands marked for disposal.

Section 4—Four years after a land sale is made, drops the requirement in current law that 80 percent of those proceeds be made available for land acquisition in the same state in which the sale occurred. The wide divergence of federal ownership patterns in western states means some states have more federal land suitable for disposal than they have land-locked private or state land appropriate for federal acquisition. This provision provides flexibility to shift acquisition dollars to other states, but only after states have had ample time to identify land suitable for conservation.

Section 5—In developing procedures to prioritize land for acquisition, requires agencies to consider “the extent to which the acquisition of the land or interest therein will increase the public availability of resources for, and facilitate public access to, hunting, fishing and other recreational activities.”

Section 6—At the expiration of the reauthorization period, devotes any remaining funds in the FLTFA account to deficit reduction.

Section 7—Makes technical and conforming changes to account for legislation passed since 2000.