

PUBLIC LANDS

BLM to transfer nearly 18K acres to Colo.

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A sign marks state trust land in Colorado. Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

The Interior Department is preparing to transfer nearly 18,000 acres of public lands to Colorado next year in the agency's latest effort to settle outstanding acreage debts to a handful of Western states.

The Bureau of Land Management announced the proposed handover this week, which would shift control of 17,700 acres of surface and mineral estate, and an additional 6,000 acres of mineral estate, to the Centennial State.

"The BLM worked closely with the state of Colorado to identify the acreage proposed for transfer to match the estimated value of what the owed 9,000 acres are currently worth," BLM Colorado State Director Jamie Connell said in a statement.

The exchange would satisfy an obligation dating to 1876, when Colorado and other Western states received a share of new federal lands on admission to the union.

The parcels — known as "state trust lands" to be used to support public institutions like schools or hospitals — were spread out at regular intervals across each state.

But in some cases, the designated land had already been claimed by individual homesteaders, railroads or Indian reservations, creating "debts" for the federal government to the states.

The Wilderness Society's senior regional director, Scott Miller, said he appreciates the push to finalize the remainder of the state grant.

"In general, from an environmental standpoint, the sooner they get finalized the better," he said.

But Miller added that "the devil is in the details" of the specific parcels to be conveyed. He said he has not reviewed those details.

"The purpose of the public comment period is to allow the public an opportunity to look at the details and voice any concerns and suggestions they might have," he said.

The public comment period for the proposed Colorado transfer will close Dec. 23.

"We are looking forward to hearing from the public to help inform our decision," Connell said.

The proposed state lands are "near or intermingled" with existing state-owned lands across 16 counties. BLM must complete an environmental analysis before the agreement is finalized.

BLM could not provide a list of current land debts to states.

In the landmark 1980 Supreme Court ruling in *Andrus v. Utah*, court documents note the federal government at the time owed 571,000 acres in land grants to Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah and Wyoming. The government then owed Colorado 17,000 acres.

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