

Current Use of Federal Land Utilization Projects Granted to State and Local Agencies

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ABSTRACT. A major public policy issue of the 1930's was the cultivation of submarginal farmland. This resulted in hardship, tax delinquencies, mortgage foreclosures, and great damage to the land. Through a series of legislation, Congress acted to resettle the rural families on these lands. Permanent status for this land utilization program was provided by the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act in 1937. Just over 2.6 million acres were purchased under the Bankhead-Jones Act and nearly 8.7 million acres under prior authority. Some 80 projects totaling almost 1.3 million acres were transferred to state and local agencies. Nearly all this land is managed for multiple-use, mainly in forests, parks, wildlife refuges, and university experimental forests. These lands are required to be maintained in public use and have become integral parts of the state and local natural resource base. Public use is high and they provide outstanding opportunities in terms of demonstration and research.

Key Words: Bankhead-Jones Act, Land Utilization Project.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s some countryside lay in ruins from decades of poor farming practices. The landscape was predominately row crop agriculture. Erosion took a devastating toll on productivity.



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Forestry was developed as a result of the need to ensure an adequate and sustainable supply of desired goods and services from the forest. Because of this, land and the resources of the land are of great significance and affect our lives and living every day. Poverty, low productivity, unemployment, poor schools, and a generally unsatisfactory way of life can result from misused land resources.

One of the major issues in the 1930's was the cultivation of submarginal farmland. Hardships, tax delinquencies, and mortgage foreclosures were common in areas where submarginal land was being farmed. Heavy damage to the land occurred due to severe droughts, floods, erosion, poor cultivation practices, and neglect.

Congress recognized and addressed the problem of submarginal agricultural lands in the Agricultural Marketing Act of June 15, 1929. It authorized the Federal Farm Board to investigate means to reduce the cultivation of marginal lands. In 1931 the Secretary of Agriculture arranged a National Conference on Land Utilization in Chicago that developed resolutions that became a model for the federal land utilization program. In 1932 a National Land Use Planning committee developed a report on acquisition, retention, and management of submarginal lands. President Hoover endorsed the recommendations and asked Congress to act.

A National Planning Board was established in the Public Works Administration in 1933. This board was succeeded by the National Resources Board in 1934. In 1934 a submarginal land purchase program was established by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration with \$25 million provided by the Federal Emergency relief Administration. The Resettlement Administration gained responsibility for the program in 1935 as adjustments in land use necessitated resettlement of rural families. Permanent status for the land utilization (LU) program was provided by the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act in 1937. The act directed the Secretary of Agriculture "to develop a program of land conservation and land utilization, including the retirement of lands which are sub-marginal or not primarily suitable for cultivation in order thereby to correct maladjustments in land use."

Submarginal lands were purchased from 1933 to 1946. Just over 2.6 million acres were purchased under the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act and nearly 8.7 million acres were purchased under prior authority. Eighty land utilization projects, totaling 1.3 million acres, were transferred to state or local agencies. These lands are managed for natural resources; mainly in forests, parks, wildlife refuges, and university experiment stations. Almost all of the land utilization projects have been under the direction and management of the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management since 1954, and now are in National

Forests and National Grasslands. Results are presented by the eight USDA Forest Service regions that encompass the 48 contiguous states (Figure 1).

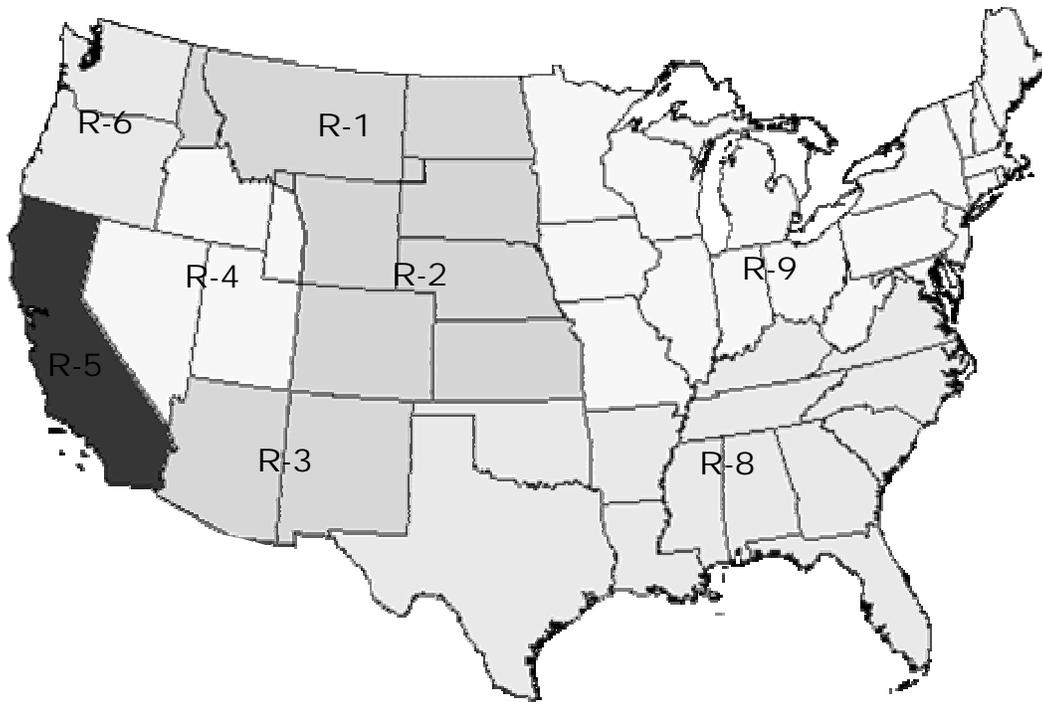


Figure 1. USDA Forest Service Regions.

Disposition of Land Utilization Projects

Currently, the records for the federal LU projects are housed in Atlanta, GA. Federal administration of these lands is under the USDA Forest Service. Those records were used to construct Tables 1 and 2. Subsequent acquisitions and depositions mean that the Atlanta records may not always agree with the overall totals presented earlier. However, these records are the best available indication of what happened to these LU project lands. Table 1 shows the federally obtained land disposition of LU projects for the eight regions up to October 1976. Note that the regions are numbered one to nine; the old region seven was eliminated and added into the current region eight. The number of LU projects for each of the 8 regions is presented; these range from 56 in the South to 2 in California. Acquired lands were developed as projects, or lands in one geographical area with like conservation and demonstration adjustment goals. These were essentially management units. Project acreage is presented in column 3. Acreages acquired and donated, transferred to public domain, and other acres are reported.

Table 2 shows dispositions of these federal lands. These lands represent acres transferred to the public domain, National Forest, National Grasslands, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Defense, and similar agencies.

We are primarily interested in the grant and sales acres in this disposition section of Table 2 (columns 4 & 5). These columns represent grants and sales of LU projects to state and local agencies. This represents the land that is currently providing huge public benefits at the state and local level. Most Americans are not aware of the source of this land.

Table 1. Disposition of land utilization projects federally obtained lands up to October 1976.

Region	# of LU Projects	Acres Acquired and Donated	Transfer Public Domain	Other Acres	NF Status Acres	National Grasslands Acres	Other Acres	Transferred Acres
1			108,037	20,954	0	1,260,000	0	2,062,669
2	5	689,355	233,935	15,323	41,092	967,463	0	14,639
3	10	658,650	71,006	7,021	304,450	136,412	240	316,571
4	3	100,768	23,177	7,306	54,351	47,659	7,041	14,825
5	2	26,778	0	7,550	7,550	0	19,233	4,357
6	3	293,631	101,621	5,504	293,111	106,138	1,581	0
8	56	1,720,169	703	12,236	799,520	163,906	6,308	74,709
9	36	520,406	561	204,029	303,770	0	28,534	0

Table 2. Disposition of land utilization projects to others up to October 1976.

Region	# of LU Projects	Acres Acquired and Donated	Grant Acres	Sales Acres	Exchanged Acres	Recovered Acres
1	11	3,092,888	600	3,144	19,168	0
2	5	689,355	160	0	15,259	0
3	10	658,650	3,120	183	7,236	604
4	3	100,768	0	0	326	0
5	2	26,778	0	0	3,188	0
6	3	293,631	0	0	5,154	0
8	56	1,720,169	500,832	179,239	5,295	236
9	36	520,406	345,563	13,991	113,360	70

Management by State and Local Agencies

The USDA Economic Research Service (Wilson1965) described the land utilization program from 1934-1964. In this report they summarized these grants to state and local agencies. Their summary to the right describes these lands.

“Some 80 of the land utilization projects, totaling 1.3 million acres, were transferred to State and local agencies. About 75 percent of this acreage was granted or sold to the agencies by the Forest Service during 1954-61 (Table 3)

Nearly all the areas are managed for multiple uses, but the 4 most important uses are for parks, forests, and wildlife refuges, and for experiment stations to study and demonstrate ways and means of achieving better use of problem areas. Management varies greatly depending upon the need, public interest, and available funds for management and development. Many areas are used by large numbers of people for recreation, camping, hunting, fishing, and educational activities such as study of forestry, wildlife, and natural features by students and young people’s groups. Other land is used for demonstration areas and experimental plots in connection with agricultural education and research. Some areas are now reaching the point where, through management and development, they have sizable incomes, or are self-supporting from sale of forest and other products, and from users’ fees and sale of licenses. Use of State parks and forests is especially heavy in the Eastern and Central Regions near centers of population where outdoor recreation areas generally are small and scarce. Among the notable example of state-managed projects in the East and Central regions are Bladen Lakes State Forest, N.C.; Clemson School Forest, S.C.; Poinsett and Cheraw State Parks, S.C.; Rock Eagle State Park, Ga.; Hard Labor Creek State Park, Ga.; Warm Springs State Park, Ga.; Yellowwood State Forest, Ind.; Zaleski State Forest, Ohio; Tar Hollow State Forest, Ohio; French Creek State Park, Pa.; Catoctin State Park, Md.; and Lake of the Ozarks State Park, Mo.”

Table 3. –Grants and sales of land utilization project land to State and local agencies, 1954-1961 ¹

Region	Grants 1,000 acres	Sales 1,000 acres	Totals 1,000 acres
Northeast	149	0	149
Lake States	79	14	93
Corn Belt	53	0	53
Northern Plains	3	0	3
Appalachian	192	14	205
Southeast	294	114	409
Delta States	10	46	56
Southern Plains	23	0	23
Mountain	3	0	3
Pacific	-	-	-
Total, 48 States	806	188	994

¹ Record of disposition of land utilization project land to May 15, 1961, which was transferred to the Forest Service Jan. 2, 1954. Prior to Jan. 2, 1954, approximately 300,000 acres were transferred to State and local agencies, making a total of about 1,300,000 acres.

It is possible that additional acreage went to Colleges or Universities, simply due to the trickle down nature of land exchanges. The data used for this study stopped at State and private levels. Therefore if a State granted sold or otherwise passed acreage to a school it was not seen at this level in the data. Region 8 granted 27,469 acres to Clemson Collage, and 15,767 acres to the University of Georgia. Region 9 granted 6,368 acres to the University of Pennsylvania, 3,212 to Cornell University, 2,212 to the University of Missouri, and 1,748 to the University of Maine. As of 2004 there are 6 LU Projects with 1,876 acres remaining in the federal system. LU projects transferred to State or other public agencies are required to be maintained in public use and managed under the provisions of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act.

Literature Cited

Wilson, M.L. 1965. The Land Utilization Program 1934 to 1964: Origin, Development, and Present Status. USDA Economic Research Service Agricultural Economic Report No. 85. 85 p.