

§ 254.12

(3) The Federal and non-Federal lands are substantially similar in location, acreage, use, and physical attributes; and

(4) There are no significant elements of value requiring complex analysis.

(b) The authorized officer, not the non-Federal party, determines whether the Federal and non-Federal lands are approximately equal in value and must document how the determination was made.

§ 254.12 Value equalization; cash equalization waiver.

(a) To equalize the agreed upon values of the Federal and non-Federal lands involved in an exchange, either with or without adjustments of relative values as compensation for various costs, the parties to an exchange may agree to:

(1) Modify the exchange proposal by adding or excluding lands; and/or

(2) Use cash equalization, after making all reasonable efforts to equalize values by adding or deleting lands.

(b) The combined amount of any cash equalization payment and/or the amount of adjustments agreed to as compensation for costs under § 254.7 of this subpart may not exceed 25 percent of the value of the Federal lands to be conveyed.

(c) The Secretary of Agriculture may not waive cash equalization payment due the United States, but the parties may agree to waive cash equalization payment due the non-Federal party. The amount to be waived may not exceed 3 percent of the value of the lands being exchanged out of Federal ownership or \$15,000, whichever is less.

(d) A cash equalization payment may be waived only after the authorized officer certifies, in writing, that the waiver will expedite the exchange and that the public interest will be best served by the waiver.

§ 254.13 Approval of exchanges; notice of decision.

(a) Upon completion of all environmental analyses and appropriate documentation, appraisals, and all other supporting studies and requirements to determine if a proposed exchange is in the public interest and in compliance with applicable law and regulations,

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the authorized officer shall decide whether to approve an exchange proposal.

(1) When a decision to approve or disapprove an exchange is made, the authorized officer shall publish a notice of the availability of the decision in newspapers of general circulation. At a minimum, the notice must include:

(i) The date of decision;

(ii) A concise description of the decision;

(iii) The name and title of the deciding official;

(iv) Directions for obtaining a copy of the decision; and

(v) The date of the beginning of the appeal period.

(2) The authorized officer shall distribute notices to the State and local governmental subdivisions having authority in the geographical area within which the lands covered by the notice are located, the non-Federal exchange parties, authorized users of involved Federal lands, the congressional delegation, and individuals who requested notification or filed written objections, and others as appropriate.

(b) For a period of 45 days after the date of publication of a notice of the availability of a decision to approve or disapprove an exchange proposal, the decision shall be subject to appeal as provided under 36 CFR part 215 or, for eligible parties, under 36 CFR part 251, subpart C.

[59 FR 10867, Mar. 8, 1994, as amended at 64 FR 25822, May 13, 1999]

§ 254.14 Exchange agreement.

(a) The parties to a proposed exchange may enter into an exchange agreement subsequent to a decision by the authorized officer to approve the exchange, pursuant to § 254.13 of this subpart. Such an agreement is required if hazardous substances are present on the non-Federal lands. An exchange agreement must contain the following:

(1) Identification of the parties, description of the lands and interests to be exchanged, identification of all reserved and outstanding interests, stipulation of any necessary cash equalization, and all other terms and conditions necessary to complete an exchange;

(2) Inclusion of the terms regarding responsibility for removal, indemnification (“hold harmless” agreement), or other remedial actions concerning any hazardous substances on the involved non-Federal lands; and

(3) The agreed upon values of the involved lands, until consummation of the land exchange.

(b) An exchange agreement, as described in paragraph (a) of this section, is legally binding on all parties, subject to the terms and conditions thereof, provided:

(1) Acceptable title can be conveyed;

(2) No substantial loss or damage occurs to either property from any cause;

(3) No undisclosed hazardous substances are found on the involved Federal or non-Federal lands prior to conveyance;

(4) The exchange proposal receives any required Secretarial approval;

(5) No objections are raised during any required congressional oversight;

(6) In the event of an appeal under 36 CFR part 215 or 36 CFR part 251, subpart C, a decision to approve an exchange proposal pursuant to §254.13 of this subpart is upheld; and

(7) The agreement is not terminated by mutual consent or upon such terms as may be provided in the agreement.

(c) In the event of a failure to perform or to comply with the terms of an exchange agreement, the noncomplying party is liable for all costs borne by the other party as a result of the proposed exchange, including, but not limited to, land surveys, appraisals, mineral examinations, timber cruises, title searches, title curative actions, cultural resource surveys and mitigation, hazardous substance surveys and controls, removal of encumbrances, arbitration, curing deficiencies preventing highest and best use of the land, and any other expenses incurred in processing the proposed land exchange.

(d) Absent an executed exchange agreement, an action taken by the parties prior to consummation of an exchange does not create any contractual or other binding obligations or rights enforceable against any party.

[59 FR 10867, Mar. 8, 1994; 59 FR 15501, Apr. 1, 1994, as amended at 64 FR 25822, May 13, 1999]

§ 254.15 Title standards.

(a) *Title evidence.* (1) Unless otherwise specified by the USDA Office of the General Counsel, evidence of title for the non-Federal lands being conveyed to the United States must be in recordable form and in conformance with the Department of Justice regulations and “Standards for the Preparation of Title Evidence in Land Acquisitions by the United States” in effect at the time of conveyance.

(2) The United States is not required to furnish title evidence for the Federal lands being exchanged.

(b) *Conveyance documents.* (1) Unless otherwise specified by the USDA Office of the General Counsel, all conveyances to the United States must be prepared, executed, and acknowledged in accordance with the Department of Justice regulations and “Standards for the Preparation of Title Evidence in Land Acquisitions by the United States” in effect at the time of conveyance.

(2) Conveyances of lands from the United States are made by patent, quitclaim deed, or deed and without express or implied warranties, except as to hazardous substances pursuant to §254.3 of this subpart.

(c) *Title encumbrances—(1) Non-Federal lands.* (i) Title to the non-Federal lands must be acceptable to the United States. For example, encumbrances such as taxes, judgment liens, mortgages, and other objections or title defects shall be eliminated, released, or waived in accordance with requirements of the preliminary title opinion of the USDA Office of the General Counsel or the Department of Justice, as appropriate.

(ii) The United States shall not accept lands in which there are reserved or outstanding interests that would interfere with the use and management of the land by the United States or would otherwise be inconsistent with the authority under which, or the purpose for which, the lands are to be acquired. Reserved interests of the non-Federal landowner are subject to the appropriate rules and regulations of the Secretary, except upon special finding by the Chief, Forest Service in the case of States, agencies, or political subdivisions thereof (36 CFR part 251, subpart A).