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Interior, Agriculture Secretaries Announce New Purchases of Western Land Parcels with High Conservation Values

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne and Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer announced today that four Federal land-management agencies are in the process of acquiring 12 pieces of property in seven Western states with \$4.7 million from a special land conservation fund.

“The nearly \$5 million to be used for these land purchases will bring into public ownership 1,587 acres that have extraordinary natural, scenic, recreational, or historical value,” said Secretary Kempthorne. “Acquiring these parcels promotes conservation while helping to ensure effective public lands management.”

“This unique joint effort enables the Federal land management agencies to work together in conserving magnificent landscapes for the benefit of the American people now and in the future,” said Secretary Schafer. “With this tool, the best land and the best water are now part of our public treasures.”

Of the 12 new properties to be purchased, Interior’s Bureau of Land Management would acquire one 575-acre conservation easement within the Henrys Lake Area of Critical Environmental Concern in Idaho to protect lakefront property from rural residential subdivision. The U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would acquire the other 11 properties, which encompass 1,012 acres.

The properties to be purchased by these three agencies are located within or next to Bridger-Teton National Forest (Wyoming), City of Rocks National Reserve (Idaho), John Day Fossil Beds National Monument (Oregon), Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Oregon), Santa Fe National Forest (New Mexico), Shasta-Trinity National Forest (California), White River National Forest (Colorado), and Zion National Park (Utah).

The special land conservation fund used to purchase these properties was established by Congress under the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act of 2000, which authorizes the purchase of private “inholdings” from willing sellers in the Western states whose acreage is surrounded by or located next to certain lands under the management of the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, or the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The pending land purchases are funded from already completed Federal land sales. Under the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act, the Bureau of Land Management is authorized to sell fragmented or isolated parcels of public land that are difficult to manage, as well as lands that may have residential or commercial value, and then use the proceeds to support land-conservation purposes.

To date, a grand total of \$49.4 million in funding under the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act has been approved for the acquisition of 24 parcels comprising 11,748 acres.

“The benefits of this sale-authority law are clear,” said Kempthorne, who noted that the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act is set to expire in 2010.

The Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service are part of the U.S. Department of the Interior; the U.S. Forest Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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