

**Statement of
Ned Farquhar
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Land & Minerals Management
Department of the Interior
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
S. 1140, La Pine Land Conveyance Act
June 17, 2009**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 1140, the La Pine Land Conveyance Act. The BLM does not object to the conveyances in S. 1140. We note that these conveyances are consistent with our existing authority under the Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act, so they could be accomplished administratively. We would also like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on modifications to parcel boundaries.

Background

La Pine is a rural community located in southern Deschutes County, Oregon. The BLM and the City of La Pine have a long history of working together and have completed several Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act conveyances, including the sites of the La Pine library and fire station. Since La Pine is surrounded by BLM-administered lands, community leaders have held ongoing discussions with the BLM concerning the city's need for additional land to serve other public purposes.

The R&PP Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to lease or convey public lands for recreational and public purposes, including campgrounds, municipal buildings, hospitals, and other facilities benefitting the public. The La Pine Special Sewer District submitted an R&PP application to BLM's Prineville District Office in 2007, and an amended application in January 2009, for 750 acres of BLM-administered lands on the eastern edge of the La Pine city limits. Their intention is to use the lands to expand their current wastewater treatment facilities. The parcel is largely vacant, but does contain a number of rights-of-way including a natural gas pipeline, transmission line, and roads. This parcel of land is shown as "Parcel B" on the map prepared at the request of Senator Wyden, dated May 22, 2009.

Additionally, the City of La Pine has expressed an interest in developing a public rodeo grounds and equestrian center on a 320-acre parcel of BLM-administered lands adjacent to the southwest border of the city. This parcel is also largely vacant, but contains a number of rights-of-way, including a road and transmission lines. This parcel of land is shown as "Parcel A" on the map prepared at the request of Senator Wyden, dated May 22, 2009.

S. 1140

S. 1140 proposes to convey, at no cost, to Deschutes County, Oregon, all right, title and interest of the United States to the two parcels (320 acres and 750 acres), detailed on the map prepared at the request of Senator Wyden, dated May 22, 2009. These conveyances would be subject to valid existing rights and are intended to address the city's stated need for additional land to accommodate the expansion of its wastewater treatment facilities and provide land for the development of a public rodeo grounds and equestrian center.

The bill requires that the two parcels of land be used only for purposes consistent with the R&PP Act and includes a reversionary clause to enforce that requirement. Finally, the bill requires the County to pay all administrative costs associated with the transfer.

As a matter of policy, the BLM supports working with local governments to resolve land tenure issues that advance worthwhile public policy objectives. In general, the BLM supports the proposed conveyances, as they are consistent with the existing R&PP authority. We also recommend modifying the boundaries of Parcel A to address an important travel corridor and shelter area for elk along the Little Deschutes River.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with Senator Wyden and the Committee to address the needs of La Pine, Oregon.