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Study: 23 million acres lost to US management

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal land claims in the contiguous 48 states increased by about 23 million acres over the past 30 years, an area the size of South Carolina, a government report said today.

Federal claims increased in all 48 states from 1964 to 1993 except Idaho, Utah and New Mexico, the General Accounting Office said. Most of the gains were due to expansions of national parks, national wildlife refuges and national forests.

Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, chairman of the House Resources Committee and a key opponent of new federal land acquisitions, said he asked for the study last year because he "never really believed the government's assertion that federal land ownership was actually decreasing in the Lower 48 states."

"This report outlines alarming

trends in the gradual growth of federal land ownership throughout the United States," Young said.

The report said that when Alaska and Hawaii are included, federal ownership nationwide declined from 701 million acres in 1964 to 623 million acres in 1993.

The nationwide totals were skewed by Alaska, where 96 million acres has moved out of federal management since 1964 due primarily to treaties with Native Alaskans and transfers related to the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958, the report said.

Nevada saw federal claims increase the most since 1964, an increase of about 3.7 million acres to a total of 56.8 million acres.

Other big increases were in Arizona, 2.9 million acres; California, 2.8 million acres; Florida, 1.1 million

acres; and Wyoming, 1.1 million acres.

The GAO, the investigative arm of Congress, reviewed the lands held by the nation's four major land management agencies — the Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Fish and Wildlife Service.

The four agencies manage 95 percent of the federally managed land, with the Defense Department managing most of the rest. They now account for about 27 percent of the 2.3 billion acres that make up the United States, the GAO said.

"Since fiscal year 1993, the amount of land managed by the four agencies has continued to increase as a result of the expansion of existing or creation of new, national forests, wildlife refuges and parks," the GAO said.

The four agencies manage more than half the land in five states — Alaska, 66 percent; Idaho, 61 percent; Nevada, 81 percent; Oregon, 52 percent; and Utah, 62 percent, GAO said.

The state with the smallest percentage of acres managed by the federal government is Iowa, 1 percent.

In addition to Alaska, other states with significant reductions in federal claims were Idaho, down 295,000 acres, New Mexico, down 329,848 acres, and Utah, down 579,099 acres.

Federal claims increased 404,992 acres in Oregon — from 31.7 million in 1964 to 32.1 million in 1993. It increased 304,578 acres in Washington — from 11.3 million to 11.6 million.

The federal government managed 239.5 million acres in Alaska in 1993, compared with 335.7 million acres in 1964, the GAO said.