

The land exchange debacle itself is probably the best illustration of the political power agency personnel now have. For the truth is, existing law requires that if land is needed for city or town expansion or development the federal government is obligated to make lands available at action.

This is the rub. Agency personnel have refused to act according to law. They have become so politically powerful, no western representative can touch them. And so they drag their feet, month after month, forcing cities towns and even those representing the people to give them what they want - which in this case was more land to add to their already bloated land holdings.

# North Las Vegas land swap meets new BLM objections

By Tony Batt  
Donrey Washington Bureau

8/28/93

WASHINGTON — North Las Vegas, seeking to purchase 7,500 acres of land within its city limits from the Bureau of Land Management, has run into a roadblock because the federal agency has changed the terms of the deal.

City officials, who thought they were close to an agreement, had expected to purchase "environmentally sensitive" land in Northern Nevada and swap it for the 7,500 acres they hope to develop in North Las Vegas.

But the BLM, following a reappraisal showing the North Las Vegas property's value had increased, now wants the city to purchase additional land.

City and state officials, who have been working on the deal for four years, were surprised by the BLM's new demands and now are uncertain about the future of the sale.

"We had been very close to pulling things together before this new proposal came up," said Marlene Lockard, state director for Sen. Richard Bryan, D-Nev.

Lockard, who has been assisting the city in the negotiations, said there "is a legitimate concern of additional delays."

"It is a completely different proposal, and we are still reviewing it," said Pat Howard, director of economic development for North Las Vegas. "We were surprised by this turn of events, but we're still hopeful that we will get title to the land."

Originally, the city planned to give the BLM a lump sum payment for the 7,500 acres the city wanted to buy. The land was appraised at \$45 million.

But after protests from environmentalists, the BLM changed its mind and worked out a swap to go along with a smaller cash payment. The city would now buy 3,500 acres of private land in an area called Galena, near Lake Tahoe, and exchange it as part of the payment for the 7,500 acres of BLM land within the city's borders.

A more recent appraisal upped the value of the BLM land to \$58 million, said BLM official E. Butch Hayes in Reno.

Consequently, the agency wants the city to buy and then

swap to the BLM the Galena property plus 3,000 acres near the Peavine Mountain; 11,000 acres near Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation; 4,000 acres in an area known as The Massacre Ranch in Northern Washoe County; and an undetermined amount of land in Cima, Calif., near the proposed East Mojave National Park.

The proposal is an indication of the change in philosophy at the Interior Department under the Clinton administration. The department is taking a more aggressive approach in acquiring "environmentally sensitive" land.

The BLM's new proposal, "jointly agreed to" by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, BLM Director Jim Baca and BLM Nevada Director Billy Templeton, was unveiled during an Aug. 13 meeting with city officials in Las Vegas.

City officials fear the new wrinkle in the deal will stall the North Las Vegas sale.

Negotiations will continue in another meeting between North Las Vegas and BLM officials Friday at the Interior Department in Washington.