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Higher bid offered

Effort was made to keep land from federal control

Elko attorney Grant Gerber and rancher Demar Dahl placed a bid Wednesday on land included in a Wendover exchange, explaining they were offering the U.S. Bureau of Land Management twice the appraised value in an effort to prevent more private land from falling into the hands of the federal government.

BSR Associates and the BLM propose to trade about 70,000 acres of ranch land in the Pequop Mountains for an estimated 7,000 acres in and around Wendover.

Elko County Commissioners also are opposing the exchange, not only because of the disparity of the number of acres involved, but because the BLM has demanded water rights on the ranch lands. The commission said

state law prohibits the BLM from possessing Nevada water rights.

Gerber and Dahl dropped off a \$10,000 check with Elko BLM District Manager Helen Hankins Wednesday as earnest money for their \$278,550 bid on the 5,571 acres south of Wendover that are included in the exchange. Hankins accepted the check, but warned the two men they may get it back, Gerber said. He also said they were told if the exchange does not go through, then the land will be put out to bid.

"We'd be happy to bid on it," Gerber said. "We're putting our money where our mouth is."

The two men said this land exchange is the perfect example of faulty land appraisals by the BLM and

they plan to take advantage of it. For the purpose of the exchange, the BLM has valued the land \$25 an acre. Dahl and Gerber bid \$50 an acre.

"It's so bloody ridiculous to put a \$25 per acre price on that land," Dahl said. "We want to show just how ridiculous \$25 an acre is."

The land is situated along both sides of U.S. 93A and crossed by railroad tracks. Wendover has been listed as the fastest growing community in Nevada and housing is currently at a premium.

Dahl said the appraisal on the ranch land also is incorrect.

In the early 1980s, Dahl and others purchased the Big Springs Ranch for \$1.5 million, with Dahl getting the "poor man's half" and paying \$550,000 for land west of the Pequops to add to his own ranching interests.

BSR Associates purchased the remaining 110,000 acres in November 1995 for \$4.1 million and has offered what the BLM appraisal calls the worst part of the ranch land for trade.



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in BSR exchange

Yet that same appraisal valued the 70,000 acres at \$4.2 million, more than BSR paid for the entire 110,000 acres.

Gerber also said the basic concept of trading 7,000 acres of public land for 70,000 acres of private land is wrong.

Gerber explained he is very concerned about the central government's efforts to gain control of more and more land. He cited a January 1995 U.S. General Accounting Office report on federal land acquisitions nationwide that shows the federal government has acquired 3,722,736 million acres of private Nevada land from 1964 to 1993. No other state lost more land than Nevada, which only has about 13 percent of its lands in private hands.

"This exchange and many others are continuing this trend," Gerber said. "I say, not one more acre. In fact, the trend should be in the other direction. The federal government should be disposing of its land into private ownership by sale, homestead or by any other means."

Gerber said if the trend of the last 30 years continues, 96 percent of Nevada will be controlled by the federal government by 2051, compared with 82 percent it controlled in 1969 and 87 percent it controlled in 1993.

Gerber also warned the federal government has a record of placing restrictions on land it acquires.

"Miners, ranchers, hunters, oil and gas exploration, real estate agents, in fact everyone but the bureaucrats suffer with increased government ownership," Gerber said. "The only articulated reason the federal government gives to justify its attempt to get control of this 70,000 acres of private land is that it will improve the habitat for wildlife, especially deer."

Gerber said the January 1995 GAO report also documents the restrictions imposed by the government.

"Total government control of the Pequops will result in a continuing decline of wildlife in those mountains," said Gerber, whose family has operated a guide and outfitters service. "The Nevada Department of

Transportation would be able to save money because there will no longer be a need for deer crossing signs," Gerber quipped.

Gerber and Dahl put a one-year limit on the BLM to accept their offer, a deadline they would be willing to extend should the exchange show signs of failing.

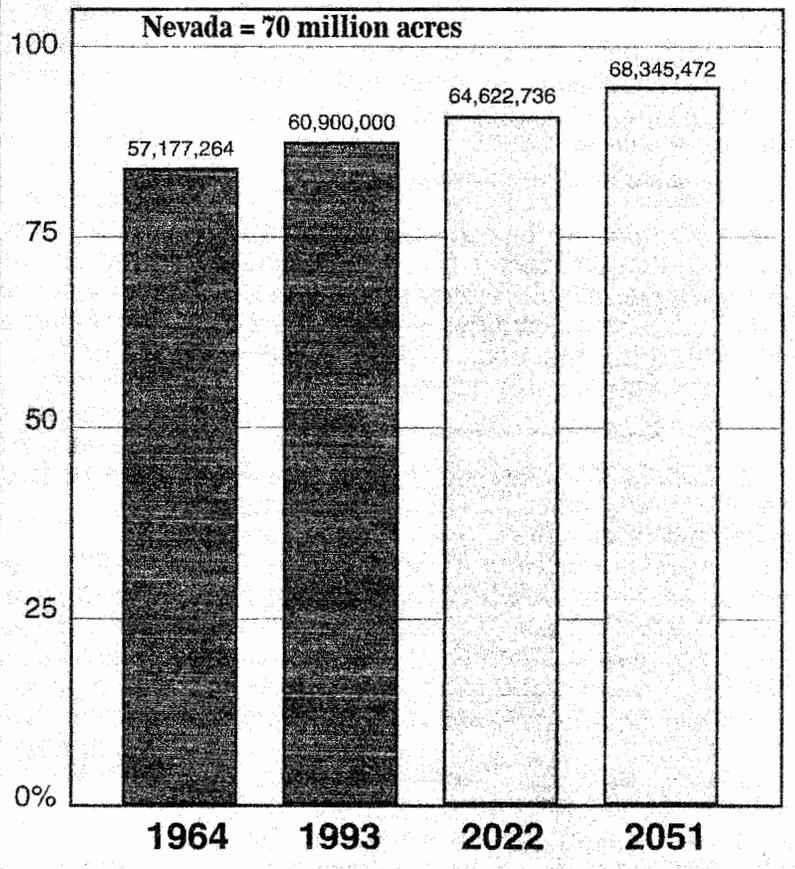
"Once they give BSR the thumbs down, then at that point we're in,"

Gerber said. "We just can't accept this exchange because if they own all the land ... it's unacceptable."

Dahl said the bid will give the BLM a chance to prove the agency is managing the lands for the benefit of the taxpayers.

"They have a duty to the American people to take our offer, especially since it's double what they say the land is worth," Dahl said.

Federal control of Nevada lands



This graph shows the increase in federal control of Nevada land between 1964 through 1993 and the projected increases if the same rate were to continue to 2051.

Acreage lost to federal control, 1964-1993

10 top states

Nevada	3,722,736
Arizona	2,941,365
California	2,845,530
Wyoming	1,133,541
Florida	1,117,533
Montana	666,819
Arkansas	662,067
Texas	552,872
Louisiana	532,636
Minnesota	507,167

10 bottom states

Rhode Island	1,471
Connecticut	5,720
Delaware	8,775
Iowa	12,234
Kansas	12,249
South Carolina	13,474
Massachusetts	19,878
Oklahoma	22,475
Maryland	37,334
New York	39,735

(Source: January 1995 GAO Federal Lands Report)

The table shows the 10 states the federal government has acquired the most lands from during a 29-year span and the 10 states that have relinquished the least land. Elko attorney Grant Gerber and rancher Demar Dahl point out that not only is Nevada nearly 90 percent controlled by federal land managers, it also leads the nation in giving up even more of its land. They say the government should be disposing of the land it controls instead of empire-building.

BLM rejects higher bid

U.S. Bureau of Land Management has turned down an offer from local attorney Grant Gerber and rancher Demar Dahl to pay double the appraised value of Wendover land involved in the agency's exchange with the Big Springs Ranch. The agency returned the pair's \$10,000 deposit.

Elko BLM District Manager Helen Hankins said she had to reject the higher offer because the lands are closed to any other bids until a final decision is made about the exchange.

"I'm surprised that the BLM is not willing to consider an offer double the value they have placed on the land," Gerber said. "We were willing to buy more than 75 percent of the land involved in the exchange at double the price. I'm surprised they made such a quick response to our offer."

The 5,571 acres Gerber and Dahl bid on are involved in the proposed exchange between BSR Associates and the BLM. About 70,000 acres of ranch land in the Pequop Mountains is being offered for about 7,000 acres of public land in and around Wendover.

Gerber and Dahl said they made their offer in an attempt to derail the BSR exchange and stem the flow of private property into the control of

the central government. They also said their offer calls attention to the artificially low value placed on the Wendover land by the BLM.

The Wendover land was valued at \$25 an acre by the BLM and Gerber and Dahl offered to pay \$50 an acre.

Hankins said if the exchange were not approved by the BLM, then the land could be opened up for bidding. She also said the higher bid would have no effect on the agency's ultimate decision concerning the exchange. She said the BLM and BSR Associates entered into an agreement that stipulates both parties work in good faith on the exchange.

But, Hankins also was quick to add that a final determination of the exact acreages involved has not been made. She said she has no control over the disparity of the acres involved because, under federal regulations, she is required to get value for value of the lands.

Dahl, however, had a different explanation for the disparity in acreages. "I think they have an agenda to acquire more land and more water. I think it's time they do the right thing and manage what they have, since they have almost 90 percent of the state already."

Gerber and Dahl also pointed out that Nevada is losing more and more of its land to federal control and leads the nation in that category. Using information from a U.S. General Accounting Office report on federal land acquisitions from 1964 to 1993, Gerber said Nevada lost 3.7 million acres and estimated 96 percent of Nevada will be under federal control by 2051.

Hankins said if the exchange goes through, the BLM would offer other public lands for disposal within the next year in an effort to equalize the disparity of the BSR exchange.

"It all depends on what people are willing to buy," she said.

The BLM would even pay for the appraisal of the lands in an effort to reduce the cost of purchasing them. But no determination has been made on what lands will be made available, she said.

Dahl said the BLM should give public lands surrounding cities and towns to the local governments, letting them sell the land to developers and use the purchase money toward infrastructure needs.

Hankins said the only way the agency can give lands to local government is through an act of Congress.