Transfer of Public Lands

WHEREAS, public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service and other federal agencies represent a birthright of the American people, provide invaluable habitat for fish and wildlife, afford opportunities for hunting, fishing, and other recreation, and support sustainable local economic activity; and

WHEREAS, the first thirteen colonies created the first Public Domain when they relinquished to the federal government their several claims to what was then the West, and all of the western states other than Texas (which entered the union as an independent republic) were created out of federal territory by formal acts of Congress; and

WHEREAS, the western states were created from public domain lands by acts of Congress and relinquished any and all claims to ownership of federal lands existing within their boundaries pursuant to the language within their respective Enabling Acts; and

WHEREAS, State legislators in Western and other states with large amounts of federal public land have passed or are attempting to pass ideologically-inspired proposals directing the federal government to extinguish its title to millions of acres of these lands and transfer title to the states in which these lands are located for various purposes, including ultimately selling the land to private interests; and
WHEREAS, some members of the United States Congress are proposing selling substantial amounts of federal public lands to private interests or transferring lands to states in order to generate short-term revenue and advance an anti-government political agenda; and

WHEREAS, the National Wildlife Federation supports a policy of retention of public lands and strict compliance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act which authorizes only limited disposal or exchange of federal public lands and only after careful public review of the values of those lands; and

WHEREAS, wholesale exchange, sale or giveaway of millions of acres of federal public lands, whether to states or private entities, is unnecessary and constitutes an irretrievable loss to all citizens of this nation as part of their national heritage; and

WHEREAS, state legislative mandates to the federal government to extinguish title appear to violate the U. S. Constitution’s Property and Supremacy clauses; and

WHEREAS, The National Wildlife Federation has vigorously opposed similar proposals for blanket disposal of federal public lands in 1983 and 1984 during the Sagebrush Rebellion and again in 2006, establishing a firm precedent of contesting such attempts;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the National Wildlife Federation, in annual meeting assembled May 1-3, 2014, in Baltimore, Maryland, hereby reaffirms its unequivocal opposition to large-scale exchange, sale or giveaway of federally managed public lands by the Bureau of Land Management, the U. S. Forest Service, National Park Service or other federal land management agencies; and
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the National Wildlife Federation supports affiliates building grassroots support to combat legislative, administrative, and legal attempts to force divestiture of federal lands and educating citizens about the practical consequences of such proposals; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Wildlife Federation urges the U.S. Department of Justice to forcefully and resolutely litigate against any state that pursues a directive mandating the federal government to extinguish title to federal lands and transfer that title to the state; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the National Wildlife Federation urges Congress and the President to reject legislation that proposes to transfer federal lands to states, sell federal lands to private interests, or otherwise liquidate the federal estate.