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Statehouse sidelights . . .

Federal land shift will benefit Idaho

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The recent transfer of 10,841 acres of federal land from the northern Idaho timber holdings means eventually that Idaho will reap benefits that will help the state educational fund.

It was probably the one positive effect of Secretary of Interior James Watt's efforts to give states a greater voice on federal land holdings, about 62 percent of Idaho.

The land transfer compensates the state for some of the land taken by the federal government at the time Idaho was admitted to statehood some 90 years ago for such purposes as national forests and parks and recreation areas.

The State Land Board formally accepted title to this land in its meeting last month. The land is located east of Coeur d'Alene, south of Priest River and in scattered areas of northern Idaho.

The transfer means that only 2,700 acres remain to be sifted, but about 4,500 of those should be ready within the next month. The state applied for 27,000 acres four years and only this past summer the U.S. Bureau of Land Management transferred the first 8,300 acres.

Land board members consisting of the top state officers with the chairman as Gov. John V. Evans agreed this is the first time in many years the federal government is on its way to paying its debt in Idaho. Intensive efforts were pressed some 10 years ago, particularly by Lt. Gov. Jack Murphy, but they stumbled against the sluggish interior department bureaucracy.

The land will be managed for timber values with the income from sales to go to local school districts.

It was ironic that the former Idaho governor, Cecil D. Andrus, was unable to speed up the land transfer for Idaho when he sat in President Carter's cabinet as the secretary of inte-

rior. He was personally sympathetic and wanted to do something but the Carter administration hierarchy was looking closely at him not to give Idaho a preference and thus nothing happened.

Andrus had done lots of the preliminary spade work that enabled the speedy transfer of the land in the present administration. It must be remembered that such complicated land transfers take many years to complete to make certain that all of the parties involved get a fair shake. Other western states have the same problems.

Secretary of State Pete T. Cenarussa said with the settlement of some 4,500 acres more within the next month, only about 3,500 will remain to complete the transfer. He pointed out these are wrapped up in the touchy Wilderness Area controversy that may not be settled for a few years. Most of these contain minerals for which discussions have not even been started.

Idaho was owed originally about 38,000 acres from the federal government under the terms of an agreement reached after Idaho assumed statehood in 1890. This agreement called for Idaho to give up certain parcels of land per each section and the federal government agreed to replace those with approximately equivalent parcels. It never did until the past decade.

The delays of possibly a half century means Idaho has lost uncounted millions of dollars in revenue from sale of these state lands. In fact, Murphy contended Idaho was entitled to royalties from profits of these lands but his efforts along this line were rebuffed.

Efforts were dropped for including Island Park land north of Ashton because of outcry by livestock interests and other citizen groups, explained Cenarussa. As it developed, however, Idaho is getting better forest lands than that in Island Park which will bring more revenue and will be easier to administer.

Cenarussa pointed out the economy is soft now but when housing and other building starts up again, schools could reap considerable revenue from the land. Cenarussa said he would be unable to estimate this but it would reach hundreds of thousands of dollars, and perhaps millions. It would help the schools which are forever clamoring for more money to enable them to give quality education at all levels.



Secretary of State
Pete Cenarussa