

Idaho moves in getting owed federal land

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After many years of wrangling, Idaho is near the end of getting federal land owed it when Idaho was admitted to the union 90 years ago.

Secretary of State Pete T. Cenarussa told The Post-Register in a telephone interview Friday the state has just "clear listed," or received title, to 8,300 acres for transfer in its latest agreement and is near acquiring 10,000 more acres from the federal government.

Remaining to be settled are 4,000 more acres which are wrapped up in the wilderness area controversy that may not be settled for a few years and 3,000 acres of mineral land for which discussions have not even been started.

Eight years ago, 8,500 acres were transferred after considerable dickering and previous to that some 5,000 acres had been shifted.

Idaho was owed about 38,000 acres from the federal government under terms of an agreement reached when the

state joined the union in 1890. The 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.

Cenarussa, who has served as secretary of state since May 1967, has been involved in much of this in-lieu land transfer negotiation.

It was ironic that Cecil D. Andrus, who resigned as governor to take over as secretary of interior under President Jimmy Carter, was unable to reach an agreement on Idaho land transfer during his four year in office.

Many had believed that with a sympathetic interior secretary the Idaho in-lieu land transfer would be completed, but nothing happened.

"Andrus tried, but I guess there were too many people in the administration who were looking at him not to give Idaho a preference, so we didn't get anywhere," said Cenarussa.

He said there appeared reluctance on the part of the Carter administration to transfer prime forest lands in the Idaho Panhandle but under the Reagan administration this has not been the case.

The 8,300 acres "clear listed," or transferred and with a clear title given to Idaho, embraced prime forest land in the St. Maries area.

Of the 10,000 more which have been advertised for transfer, most are also in the Panhandle except for a few hundred acres between Cascade and Payette.

Cenarussa said he sees considerable negotiations on the 4,000 acres tied up in the Wilderness area while the Idaho Land Board hasn't even started to consider a selection of the 3,000 acres of mineral land.

"We haven't even applied for it as yet," said Cenarussa. "We must give this a closer look later but right now we have been concentrating on the timber lands."

Cenarussa said efforts were dropped for including Island Park land north of Ashton in eastern Idaho because of outcry by livestock interests and other citizen groups.

"I think we got better lands now because the Island Park land would have been difficult to handle," he said.

"In other words out of the 38,000 acres originally owed to Idaho, we have received or reached an agreement to get a total of 31,000 acres. That will leave only 7,000, and these could be a few years down the road."

Cenarussa pointed out the revenue from this land will go into the School Endowment Fund to help schools.

He noted the economy is soft now but when housing and other building starts up again, schools could reap considerable revenue from the land.

"I can't begin to estimate what the state will get because of economic factors but it will be hundreds of thousands of dollars," he concluded.