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AERC Board of Directors Passes Resolution to Oppose the Sale of Federal Lands Managed by the Departments of Interior and Agriculture to State Ownership

Votes to Add AERC to Organizations that Support Senate Bill 1110 and House Bill 845

AUBURN, California – September 17, 2015 – For almost 100 years, Americans have enjoyed access to federal lands for recreational use. Now millions of acres of federal land are at risk of being transferred to individual states, a move with significant repercussions for equestrians who use the extensive trails to ride for pleasure or competition.

On March 26, 2015, the United States Senate approved a budget resolution that would establish a procedure for selling, exchanging or transferring to the individual states federal lands that are not national parks, monuments or reserves. Also in March the Chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT), requested \$50 million for the Fiscal Year 2016 Federal budget in order to facilitate immediate transfer of public lands to state control.

A resolution to oppose the federal-to-state land transfers by the federal government was passed unanimously at the American Endurance Ride Conference's midyear board meeting on August 15. The AERC and its Trails and Land Management Committee has joined other concerned organizations such as the Back Country Horseman of America who have already publicly denounced the federal government's intentions on this issue. AERC, a non-profit organization with more than 5,000 members, sanctions endurance rides of 25-100 miles throughout the United States and Canada, and is a leading proponent of trail building and maintenance, especially of historically significant trails.

The proposed land transfer has many downsides for trail users, such as that state and local government-managed lands typically do not embrace the "multiple use mandates" that guide federal land management agencies, including promoting diverse opportunities for public outdoor recreation. This means that equestrian access to the lands that are sold to states – and potentially resold by states to individuals or global corporations – could be severely limited or even denied and/or fees for access to public lands or amenities such as camping grounds could increase significantly. In addition, the sale of federal land to the states calls into question the states' ability to address wild land fires and the current lack

of fire-fighting resources and capabilities by the states.

In response the AERC Trails and Land Management Committee put forth the following Resolution, which was passed unanimously at the AERC BOD midyear meeting in August:

AERC Resolution To Oppose The Transfer Or Sale Of Federal Public Lands Managed By The United States Departments Of Interior And Agriculture

Whereas, a mission of the American Endurance Ride Conference (herein known as AERC) is to develop, use, preserve trails, and to work to ensure public lands remain open to recreational equestrian saddle use, and

Whereas, the public lands of this nation managed by the United States Department of the Interior and Agriculture are a part of our national treasure and heritage, and

Whereas, these public lands are held in perpetuity to benefit future generations of Americans because of the renewable resources and recreational value, and

Whereas, we support the sustainable management of resources on federal lands in cooperation with other stakeholders, and

Whereas, the transfer or sale of these lands will remove large acreages from the national federal public lands system, fragmenting existing land areas, compromise public access, and set a precedent for privatization of all public land, and

Whereas, specifically the disposal of these federal lands will decrease the opportunity for all recreational use of these lands,

Whereas, no federal lands should be removed or transferred except for lands considered under the Federal Land Transaction Reconciliation Act (FLTRA, PL 106-248),

Therefore, be it resolved by the AERC to go on record in opposition to any plan, action or legislation for the disposal, sale, or transfer of public lands managed by the United States Department of the Interior and Agriculture (except under FLTRA) and

Be it further resolved that this resolution be made to the President of the United States of America, congressional delegations and elected officials from each state, and agency officials of the Department of the Interior and Agriculture.

“Preserving access for our members to the public lands that we enjoy is a priority for the AERC,” said Monica Chapman, AERC Trails and Land Management Committee chair.

“We need to continue to take a custodial role in maintaining these lands and in keeping trails available for equestrians and other outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy for generations to come.”

AERC’s 26-member board also voted to support S.1110 and H.R. 845, two identical bills

that would promote volunteerism in the service of our national forest trails. Known as the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, S.1110 was initially promoted by Back Country Horseman's Association, The Wilderness Society and the American Horse Council.

If enacted as currently written, S.1110 and H.R. 845 would:

- Direct the U.S. Forest Service to develop a strategy to more effectively utilize volunteers and partners to assist in maintaining national forest trails;
- Provide outfitters and guides the ability to pay permit fees in trail maintenance activities instead of dollars;
- Address the liability issue that hampers volunteer and partner trail maintenance activity in some national forests; and
- Prioritize specific areas for trail maintenance within national forests.

Today, the bill enjoys widespread support among the national trails community, including national organizations representing hikers, climbers, mountain bikers, motorcyclists and snowmobile riders. Click [here](#) to read the text of the Senate bill as introduced.

About the AERC

In addition to promoting the sport of endurance riding, the AERC encourages the use, protection, and development of equestrian trails, especially those with historic significance. Many special events of four to six consecutive days take place over historic trails, such as the Pony Express Trail, the Outlaw Trail, the Chief Joseph Trail, and the Lewis and Clark Trail. The founding ride of endurance riding, the Western States Trail Ride or Tevis Cup, covers 100 miles of the famous Western States and Immigrant Trails over the Sierra Nevada Mountains. These rides promote awareness of the importance of trail preservation for future generations and foster an appreciation of our American heritage.

The American Endurance Ride Conference, established in 1972, is headquartered in Auburn, California, "The Endurance Capital of the World." For more information please visit us at www.aerc.org.

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