

**SHASTA RESOURCES COUNCIL**  
*Securing Old Shasta's Future*

May 10, 2005

Steven W. Anderson, Field Manager  
Bureau of Land Management  
355 Hemsted Drive  
Redding, CA 96002

RE: BLM DIRECT LAND SALES

Dear Mr. Anderson:

As you are aware, we are in the process of forming a revenue district to fund acquisition of Area 51 and other BLM holdings in Old Shasta for public purposes. We write to express our support for the Bureau of Land Management's proposed policy change that would favor conveyance of land holdings via direct sale, as opposed to the exchange process that currently prevails.

We believe the land exchange process inequitably works to the advantage of land speculators and developers, at the expense of the taxpayer and, in particular, nearby landowners and the host community. Direct sales by the BLM to the highest bidder would most likely produce the greatest value for the land, and would be a process open to public review and participation. Under the current exchange process, there is no realistic opportunity for the general public to acquire BLM holdings, as the public would have to speculatively purchase land of possible interest to the BLM, but with no guarantee that an exchange would ultimately come to fruition. The BLM frequently receives inquiries from nearby property owners about the purchase of public land, such that under a direct sales approach, it would be very feasible for the public to marshal their resources and competitively bid for BLM holdings.

The current exchange process, in our estimation, is shadowy to the public and relies on land valuations performed by appraisers selected by the two parties desirous of effectuating the exchange. The subjectivity of the appraisal process, coupled with the public's virtual exclusion from the process, have led to disagreements over the "Area 51" exchange proposal, and will likely continue to be a source of contention upon future exchange proposals.

Changing the conveyance process to favor direct sales, which would give the general public a fair chance to acquire BLM holdings, would be more conducive to yielding results in the best interest of the BLM and the public at large. In the Old Shasta area,

for instance, many property owners would like to acquire BLM land for the purpose of preserving the open space, or at least conserving the resources. The current exchange system, while probably not by original design, now clearly fosters land speculation and development of holdings that at some time in the past were considered a valuable enough public resource to be held by the BLM for public purposes. The potential for acquisition by local residents, via direct sales, of BLM holdings, would create an opportunity for "win-win" situations in terms of preserving land of significant resource value. However, in order to insure that this latter benefit is realized in as many instances as feasible, it will be necessary for BLM staff to act as facilitators. This will involve providing assistance and guidance to host community members and local government representatives in the implementation of funding strategies and navigating the mechanics of acquisition. It is also appropriate and incumbent on the BLM as servants of the public, that the host community be afforded the right of first refusal in all direct sale scenarios. This right should be sustained for a period of at least one year from the point at which the land is offered for direct sale and the price and terms established.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shasta Resources Council

xc: Congressman Wally Herger  
Senator Barbara Boxer  
Senator Diane Feinstein  
Alex Breitler, Environmental Reporter, Record Searchlight