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# Scope and Methodology

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To determine the trends in the land exchanges completed by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (Bureau) and the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (Service) during fiscal years 1989 through 1999, we reviewed data maintained by each agency regarding (1) the number of exchanges or exchange transactions, (2) the acreage acquired and conveyed, and (3) the dollar value of the Service's exchanges, for each of those fiscal years. The Bureau does not centrally track the value of its exchanges. We completed several analyses to ascertain whether there were any clear trends and to identify any other meaningful relationships in the data. Although we did not verify the accuracy of all of these data, due to time constraints, we did validate the information to the extent that we could by cross-checking with other data sources.

To determine whether the agencies can assure that their land exchanges appropriately value the land, serve the public interest, and meet other requirements, we first reviewed statutory and other requirements for land exchanges. To categorize the concerns that had been raised by others regarding the agencies' land exchanges, we (1) reviewed prior audit reports addressing land exchanges that had been issued by the Departments' Offices of Inspectors General and by GAO and interviewed cognizant staff from the Offices of Inspectors General, (2) reviewed several articles that were published in the media in 1998, (3) reviewed other information obtained by the Western Land Exchange Project (a nonprofit organization that gathers and disseminates information on land exchanges) and interviewed the Project's Director, and (4) interviewed representatives of both agencies. To assess whether agencies were meeting statutory requirements in completing exchanges, we selected 51 exchanges (both recently completed and still in process) and reviewed them in light of these requirements. In selecting the exchanges, we considered the following factors: the acreage, the complexity (such as the presence of legal or environmental concerns), the value of land, the purpose, the geographic location, the extent of controversy, and the involvement of third parties (such as real estate companies who facilitate exchanges). We identified 25 Service exchanges, located in 7 of the Service's 8 administrative regions in the lower 48 states, and 26 Bureau exchanges, located in the 11 contiguous western states covered by the Bureau. Table III.1 shows the number and location of these exchanges and compares the Service's regions with the Bureau's states.

**Table 1: Number and Location of Selected Exchanges**

Service		Bureau	
Region	Exchanges	State	Exchanges
1 Northern	4	Montana	2
2 Rocky Mountain	1	Colorado	1
		Wyoming	1
3 Southwestern	5	Arizona	5
		New Mexico	1
4 Intermountain	7	Idaho	2
		Nevada	4
		Utah	2
5 Pacific Southwest	0	California	6
6 Pacific Northwest	4	Oregon	1
		Washington	1
8 Southern	3		
9 Eastern	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>		<b>26</b>

Note: The Service does not have a Region 7. Region 10 is Alaska, and we did not review any exchanges in Alaska.

To determine the effect of the agencies' recent efforts to improve management of their land exchange programs, we interviewed the leaders and some members of the agencies' national review teams and reviewed reports issued by both teams. We also accompanied the Bureau's team during its review of one state office. We also reviewed revisions to the agencies' policies and procedures that have been drafted or issued.

We conducted our work by visiting the following locations: Interior's Solicitor's Office and Office of the Inspector General (Washington, D.C.); the Bureau's Washington Office (Washington, D.C.), Colorado State Office (Lakewood, Colorado), Utah State Office (Salt Lake City, Utah), St. George Field Office (St. George, Utah), and Uncompahgre Field Office (Montrose, Colorado); Agriculture's Office of the Inspector General (Washington, D.C.); and the Service's Washington Office (Washington, D.C.), Region 2 Office (Lakewood, Colorado), Region 4 Office (Ogden, Utah), Region 8 Office (Atlanta, Georgia), and National Forests in North Carolina Supervisor's Office (Asheville, North Carolina). We also spoke with realty officials in the following agency offices: the Bureau's Arizona State Office (Phoenix, Arizona), California State Office (Sacramento, California),

Montana State Office (Billings, Montana), Nevada State Office (Reno, Nevada), Wyoming State Office (Cheyenne, Wyoming), Casper Field Office (Casper, Wyoming), Elko Field Office (Elko, Nevada), Safford Field Office (Safford, Arizona), and Worland Field Office (Worland, Wyoming); and the Service's Region 5 Office (San Francisco, California), Region 6 Office (Portland, Oregon), Boise National Forest Supervisor's Office (Boise, Idaho), Bridger-Teton National Forest Supervisor's Office (Jackson, Wyoming), Fishlake National Forest Supervisor's Office (Richland, Utah), Targhee National Forest Supervisor's Office (St. Anthony, Idaho), and the Wasatch-Cache National Forest Supervisor's Office (Salt Lake City, Utah). In addition, we attended a Service Land Adjustment Workshop (Lake Tahoe, California); met with the Director of the Western Land Exchange Project (Seattle, Washington); and had discussions with an appraiser from the Farm America Appraisal Services (Omaha, Nebraska), officials of assessors offices and clerk and recorder offices for three Colorado counties (Delta County, Gunnison County, and Montrose County), an official of Gunnison Savings and Loan (Gunnison, Colorado), and a former Deputy State Director of Natural Resources for the Bureau's Nevada State Office (Reno, Nevada).

We performed our work from June 1999 through May 2000 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

# GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgements

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