

180,000,000 ACRES

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President's Group Advises Transfer of Lands to Western States.

(United Press.)

A comprehensive plan for relinquishment by the Federal Government of 180,000,000 acres of land, a tract as large as Central Europe, was embodied in a report of one of President Hoover's first commissions, made public last night.

The Committee on the Conservation and Administration of the Public Domain recommended legislation to turn over all this land to the 22 Western States in which it is located. The hope was expressed in the report that this land would be transferred ultimately to private ownership as rapidly as possible. The States would be expected to offer inducements for its purchase by private interests.

Acceptance Is Optional.

However, the States would not be required to accept the Federal property unless they so desired; an act of the State Legislature would be necessary to consummate the transfer.

The report was drawn after eighteen months of investigation. James R. Garfield, former Interior Secretary and chairman of the commission, said in a statement last night that the report was designed to enable drafting of legislation to take care of this long-standing problem. Dr. Elwood Mead, Reclamation Bureau Commissioner and another member, said his bureau approved the report. Dr. Mead especially praised the commission's recommendation for using electric power revenues to pay off the cost of water developments.

The commission of eighteen also included Mary Roberts Rinehart, novelist, former Senator H. O. Bursum, of New Mexico, and George Horace Lorimer, editor of the Saturday Evening Post.

Five Points Stressed.

Five major points were stressed in the report. They were:

1. Transfer of the vacant, unreserved public lands under a ten-year program.

2. Use and conservation of water resources on the land, particularly for flood control and reclamation.

3. Conservation by the Government of the subsurface minerals known to exist, but transfer of subsequent mineral rights to the States.

4. Conservation of timber resources in national forests, with recommendations for additions to the existing forest tracts.

5. Changes in administration 'which might produce greater efficiency in the conservation and use of the natural resources of the Nation.

Specific reservations were made in the case of known mineral lands. Nonmineral tracts would be transferred to the States in fee simple, but in the case of mineral lands, the Federal Government would reserve the right to all minerals known to exist at the time of clear listing. Any minerals not then known to be present, but later discovered, would be the property of the States.

Fee Simple Transfer.

Transfer of such mineral lands would be in fee simple, but with the above stated reservations, including "reservation in the United States, its permittees, lessees, or grantees, of the right to enter upon the land to prospect for, mine, and remove such minerals."

The Boulder Dam project was accepted as a model for future flood-control plans. The problem of disposition of hydroelectric power thus generated was mentioned but briefly, as follows:

"As an incident to flood-control projects, the generation of power and the development of water for irrigation can be made to pay their part, but the frequent practice of the past of loading all the costs upon the shoulders of the landowner is inequitable and should be discontinued.

Boulder Dam Is Cited.

"Recognition of that principle appears in the Boulder Dam project act." Various details of arrangements for transfer were suggested. The report recommended that any land refused by the States be turned into a national range, subject to grazing research and range improvement, as well as disposition of receipts, homestead provisions and the prospecting for and utilization of minerals.

Inclusion of such tracts in the national range would be made upon application of the State land commissioner, under authorization of the Legislature. In the absence of such legislation and formal application at the end of ten years, the President would be authorized to establish the national range in such States by executive order.

In the case of lands specifically reserved to the Federal Government for such purposes as national forests, reclamation, national parks and migratory bird refuges, the Government would have authority to make exchanges with States or private owners for purposes of consolidation.

Full Hearings Provided.

No such exchanges could be made without full hearings, and consideration would be given to those who have been using the land for many years.

In the administration of the lands, the Government and the States would be required to "perpetuate the best interests of the live stock industry." Location and protection of stock driveways would be given immediate consideration, and pending determination of how much of this land is to be given to the States, the Government is asked to cooperate with stock raisers' associations as to use, location and policing.

The present ratio of Federal participation in highway construction is recommended continued for ten years. Congress is asked to provide sufficient funds for a survey by the General Land Office of unsurveyed lands. A board would be created in the Interior Department to arrange and administer transfer of the land