



USDA Forest Service
SRS Comments
Lands 4S
1400 Independence Ave., SW.
Mailstop 1124
Washington, DC 20250-0003

March 18, 2006

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Flathead Audubon Society is a local, active group of people interested in sound stewardship and management of natural resources. Our members frequently use National Forest lands for a variety of purposes.

We wish to go on record as strongly opposing the sale of any Forest Service parcels as proposed in the Secure Rural Schools Land Sales Initiative as described in the Federal Register on February 28, 2006.

There are many reasons to oppose the sales. Sale of Forest Service lands now is a very shortsighted view of the value of public lands since they continue to increase in value especially as our population increases rapidly. Congress certainly has many other options for funding the Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act of 2000 should Congress decide to extend it.

Parcels such as those proposed for sale have long had multiple values to the public. In some cases, they may provide the only public access to lakes, rivers, or other recreational uses. In crowded or highly developed areas, such parcels may provide the only open space available to the public. Small parcels may contain high quality wildlife habitats, recreational values or environmentally or culturally sensitive sites.

Parcels such as those proposed for sale have traditionally been used, where appropriate, in land exchange programs to "block up" Forest Service ownership or exchange for parcels with even higher environmental values. Sale of these parcels now would preclude future land exchanges that improve the value of public lands.

As part owners of the public land, we want to retain the public ownership for its existing and future values.

Yours truly,

/s/Bob Lopp
/s/Lewis Young

Bob Lopp, President
Lewis Young, Conservation Chair
Flathead Audubon Society

cc to: Flathead County Commissioners
Senator Conrad Burns
Senator Max Baucus
Representative Dennis Rehberg
Governor Brian Schweitzer