

OUR PUBLIC LANDS . . .



500 million acres of land that belong to us and to our neighbors and to all the people of the United States . . . public lands that are rich in natural resources . . . timber, rangeland, water, minerals, and land for every use . . . "active acres" that must be carefully and wisely managed for the welfare of the Nation . . .

As a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on the development, utilization, and conservation of the resources on public lands, this periodical contains no copyrighted material. If pictures or material are reprinted, a credit line should be given OUR PUBLIC LANDS and the Bureau of Land Management.

CARLOS WHITING, *Editor.*

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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

AREA ADMINISTRATION <i>by</i> MARION CLAWSON, <i>Director</i> , Bureau of Land Management	3
HOW TO ACQUIRE A SMALL TRACT <i>by</i> RICHARD J. McCORMICK, <i>Regional Adjudicator</i> , Region VI	4
GYPSUM FROM PUBLIC LANDS <i>by</i> GWYNNE H. SHARRER, <i>Regional Chief</i> , Division of Forestry, Region II	5
TEACHING RESOURCE MANAGEMENT <i>by</i> GEORGE H. GLOEGE, <i>professor of education</i> , Eastern Montana College Education, Billings, Mont.	6
CAFETERIA LAND OFFICE <i>by</i> WILLIAM RIDDELL, <i>Manager</i> , Billings Land Office	7
SNOWBOUND	8
FROM SAGEBRUSH TO GRASS <i>by</i> HAROLD E. SMITH, <i>Darlington</i> , Idaho, 1951 Grassman of the Year	13
FEATURES	
ACTIVE ACRES	10
LAND USERS' Q AND A CORNER	12
ITS THE LAND LAW	16

COVER

Squaw Butte, an experiment station operated cooperatively by Oregon State College and the Bureau of Land Management, is the scene each year of a BLM "resource management seminar" for the benefit and training of Bureau professional and administrative personnel. Properly called the Squaw Butte-Harney Branch Range and Livestock Station, near Bend, Oreg., the site is dominated by a desolate peak—the original Squaw Butte—which can be seen in the cover photo.



HOW TO ACQUIRE A SMALL TRACT

by RICHARD J. McCORMICK, *Regional Adjudicator, Region VI*

Just how did small tracts, or as some folks call them, "jack-rabbit homesteads," get started?

When the Small Tract Act of 1938 was passed, and later extended to Alaska, it brought a real opportunity to veterans and others to lease and buy a piece of Government land at nominal cost.

The lands disposed of under the small-tract law are remnants of public land which, because of their scattered areas, are not economical to administer in a Federal land-management program. These lands, of course, are not always located in the place where everyone wants to settle.

Some people ask for tracts in Maine or Vermont. We do not have any public lands in the Original Thirteen States, nor in Kentucky, Maine, Vermont, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Texas.

The Bureau of Land Management actually administers some 500 million acres of land located in 13 Western States and in Alaska, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, and Wisconsin. But many of these lands are already in use for grazing or other multiple uses. Some of the lands are reserved by the Army for special military needs.

A post card or letter addressed to the Director of the Bureau of Land Management in Washington or to one of the regional offices usually starts an individual on the road to the acquisition of a small tract and its ultimate transfer to a State tax roll.

The small-tract law allows occupancy and use of land classified as a home, cabin, camp, health, convalescent, recreational, or business site. After full compliance with the law and regulations, sale may be authorized to any person who is a head of a family or 21 years old and a citizen of the United States or has filed declaration of intention to become a citizen in accordance with our Government's naturalization laws. A married woman is not qualified to apply unless she can show that she is actually the head of a family. Single girls are eligible, especially those who have been in war services.

The people who leased small tracts, veterans of World Wars I and II, as well as the general public, have worked hard to make them livable. Many

communities established by "small tractors" have water, telephones, electricity, schools, streets, sewers, and stores. California, with the largest number of pending leases and areas classified for small-tract use, has extensive developments on the Mohave Desert near Twenty-nine Palms, about 75 miles southeast of Los Angeles. Alaska, a cog in our national defense program, is systematically meeting defense housing needs by development of areas for small-tract use. Florida's classified tracts along its northwest coast line, one of the fastest developing community areas in the country, are all under lease; and as a result of fine cooperation of county and State authorities, road building and availability of materials, many attractive tourist cabins and substantial homes have been completed.

The Bureau of Land Management stands ready to give a patent to each lessee who complies with the terms of his lease and places a permanent home upon the land, acquires water and meets local sanitation requirements.

Lessees who have received patents from our agency developed their tracts at costs ranging from \$2,500 for a cabin and water to \$130,000 for motels and restaurant.

Sometimes a small tract area is opened because a modern pioneer requests a piece of ground he has discovered after selection of land descriptions supplied by the Bureau. If the land has been surveyed, we accept an offer to lease of not to exceed 5 acres.

A field examination is made by an officer of the Bureau and his report and recommendations are carefully considered and analyzed to determine whether the vacant public lands in the area may be classified for lease and disposal under the small-tract law.

We supply interested individuals with a combination application offer of lease and lease form which, if properly filled in, and accompanied by filing fee and rental, will be executed and returned to the lessee within a reasonable time by the Bureau's signing officer. The filing fee on each application is \$10, which the Government keeps.

(Continued on page 12)

SMALL TRACTS

(Continued from page 4)

if a lease issues. The filing fee is returned to the sender if he fails to get a lease. In addition, a payment of advance rental of \$15 is required for a 3-year residence lease, and \$100 rental for a 5-year lease issued for combination home and business purposes. The lease shows the purchase price of the lot, if for sale, and reserves a right-of-way usually 33 feet wide for roads, sidewalks, telephone and power poles.

We try to make the procedure for obtaining a lease as simple as possible. Because of the demand for public land and our limited personnel, it takes patience, understanding and cooperation on both the part of the applicant and the Bureau employee. As we become swamped with mail inquiries for filing applications and bogged down by visitors, often we are all required to stop regular duties to assist in handling the rush.

When we begin to get more applications than we have tracts available, we necessarily plan a drawing. The drawing idea, though not perfect, is certainly better than an "Oklahoma land rush." The drawing gives everyone an equal chance and only the ones who get a lot pay the filing fees and rentals after a drawing is held.

In one of the regions where a drawing was held the classification order describing the lands, indicating their value and accessibility, was duplicated. It was accompanied by plats of survey, reduced to the size of the paper used for the order, showing highways to be traveled in reaching the land. Copies of orders and plats are mailed on request to veterans' organizations and to interested persons, including editors of local newspapers. Another copy usually goes to the postmaster in the

county seat for posting on the post office bulletin board.

Drawing entry cards are mailed to interested parties stating that only veterans of World War II may participate in a drawing. The card shows name of veteran, his permanent mailing address, number of classification order, and deadline for receipt of card in the office where drawing will be held. The front of the card, prepared for mailing to addressee, has lines for name, number and street, city, zone number and State. As cards come in, they are filed alphabetically for quick reference to answer telephone calls, and to catch duplicate filings, since only one card may be filed by each veteran of World War II.

On the drawing day, all cards go into a large container. They are mixed together and a disinterested party helps to draw. As drawn, each card is assigned a lot number, beginning with "1" and ending with the last lot number. The lots on plats of survey are usually numbered from, say, 1 to 90. Sufficient alternates are drawn so that enough applicants will be available to accept leases offered. Lease forms are prepared in advance of drawing. Only the name and address of successful drawee are added. All cards of unsuccessful participants are placed in the mails immediately following the drawing.

A standard form decision is prepared for transmittal of the lease form notifying the successful applicant to sign both forms; submit photostatic or certified copy of honorable discharge; and send filing fee and full rental.

The wise application of the small-tract law has aided materially in serving the public, and in furthering our purpose of helping individuals seeking economic security and to acquire land for a home.

LAND USERS'

Q and A Corner

Q. What lands are available for homesteading?

A. Only those lands in the remaining public domain . . . principally in the West and in Alaska.

Q. If BLM manages nearly half a billion acres of public domain, why is a homestead hard to get?

A. The law requires homestead land to be suitable for agriculture, and most public lands in the West are too arid for farming. Only a small part of Alaska can be successfully farmed.

Q. What are "withdrawn" lands?

A. They are areas of the public domain reserved from settlement and most other private uses, and are held for such public purposes as military reservations, parks, forests, classification, and in aid of legislation.

Q. What is land scrip and who gets it?

A. Scrip is a right—usually supported by a document that in itself may be called "scrip"—which entitles its holder to a selection of public lands of a given acreage which may be available for settlement. It was given by the Congress to those who rendered the Government a service (as veterans) and in lieu of lands taken for public use.

This corner will answer selected questions directed to the editor of OUR PUBLIC LANDS