

New Mexico State Land Office

Patrick H. Lyons, Commissioner of Public Lands



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LAND COMMISSIONER CALLS ATTORNEY GENERAL'S LAWSUIT "BOGUS"

SANTA FE – A major point of contention between Land Commissioner Patrick Lyons and Attorney General Gary King over a land swap in Northern New Mexico wasn't included in a petition filed Monday by the attorney general with the New Mexico Supreme Court.

"I'm confused as to why the deputy attorney general would write me a three page letter about how defective the Whites Peak appraisals were, then not include them in his complaint," Commissioner Lyons said, referring to a December 23rd letter from Chief Deputy Attorney General Albert Lama in which Lama rebuked the commissioner for accepting what Lama called substandard and deficient appraisals conducted on 9,656 privately-held acres and 10,964 acres of state trust lands in the vicinity of Whites Peak.

While the trust would lose 1,307 acres, the assets the trust would acquire from four private landowners are valued at \$23 million; whereas the value of the land being conveyed is \$10 million.

The appraisals were conducted by John T. Widdos, of South Dakota, who was recently named by American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers as "Appraiser Professional of the Year."

"The attorney general buckled under the political pressure," Lyons said. "When it became clear that Mr. Widdos' qualifications rank him among the best appraisers in the country, they had to find some other bogus issue to attack us on."

In the petition, the attorney general takes issue with the auction process before undertaking exchanges of trust lands with private parties, but the commissioner contends that the auction was conducted in conformance with the Enabling Act.

"Not only did the Land Office receive more than fair market value, consolidating holdings will enhance the value of trust lands exponentially," Lyons said. "All exchanges are designed to bring maximum benefit to the trust. In fact, land exchanges completed during my tenure have increased trust assets by nearly 84,000 acres."

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The commissioner argues that his team has followed the same process to exchange trust lands that every commissioner before him has followed.

“Every auction is advertised for 10 weeks and anyone can bid land, cash, or a combination of,” he said, “and, as always, the bid that is in the best interest of the trust is accepted.”

Lastly, Commissioner Lyons said, “I’m doing more with less. I have set new revenue records, generating more than \$3 billion for public education on a flat budget with fewer employees, none of whom earn more than \$100,000. The elected officials who are trying to tie my hands for political gain should instead be following my lead.”

Commissioner Lyons and the State Land Office manage 9 million acres of surface estate and 13 million mineral acres held in trust primarily for public education. Revenues earned from energy production, farming and ranching, and community and business development on trust lands support public schools, seven universities, the New Mexico Military Institute, the New Mexico School for the Deaf, the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three hospitals, correctional facilities, water projects, and public building repair and construction.

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