

New Mexico State Land Office

Patrick H. Lyons, Commissioner of Public Lands



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Land Commissioner Tells A.G. to Put Up or Shut Up

SANTA FE – A review of land values placed on private lands and state trust lands in the vicinity of Whites Peak ordered by Attorney General Gary King that allegedly discredits the State Land Office’s appraisals doesn’t even exist, therefore, Land Commissioner Patrick Lyons says the attorney general should stop his baseless assault on the commissioner and the Land Office.

Repeated attempts by Land Office attorneys to acquire the appraisal analysis conducted by Mark Cowan, a consultant employed by the attorney general, have been denied, and according to Assistant Attorney General Seth Cohen, his office has “no appraisal report, contracts, agreements, or anything in writing regarding this matter.”

“The attorney general has continually asserted that my appraisals are substandard and deficient, yet he won’t – or can’t – produce any reports to substantiate that charge,” Commissioner Lyons said.

The Land Office’s 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.”

Commissioner Lyons also noted that the attorney general’s appraiser has a conflict of interest and an ax to grind because Cowan had been contracted by the Land Office for a series of unrelated exchanges and the reports he submitted were rejected.

The commissioner also takes issue with the attorney general’s accusation that the Land Office has failed to provide the documents pertaining to the Whites Peak exchange pursuant to the Inspection of Public Records Act.

“Our records are complete and have been provided in a timely manner,” Lyons said. “I can’t say the same for the attorney general, however. The Attorney General’s Office is the very agency that is responsible for enforcing IPRA, yet apparently he feels he is above the law.”

The appraisals were conducted on 9,656 privately-held acres and 10,964 acres of state trust lands in the vicinity of Whites Peak. Commissioner Lyons is facilitating a four-party land exchange in an effort to consolidate the Land Office’s holdings; create a quality game and wildlife area; control trespass, vandalism, theft and poaching; improve access; and implement effective land management strategies.

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Commissioner Lyons and the State Land Office manage nine million acres of surface estate and thirteen million mineral acres held in trust primarily for 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 Blind and Visually Impaired, the New Mexico School for the Deaf, three hospitals, correctional facilities, public building repair and construction, and water conservation projects.

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