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BLM to auction Mesquite land

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The Bureau of Land Management's Ely Field Office in a few months is to try again to auction more than 6,000 acres in southern Lincoln County.

The 2,009- and 4,357-acre parcels, located about two miles north of Mesquite, are to go on the auction block in August. The land remains unchanged from when it was last offered for sale, in October 2001, the field office said Friday.

Under the Lincoln County Land Act of 2000, the BLM is mandated by Congress to offer for competitive bid 13,500 acres of public lands in southern Lincoln County by October 2005.

The two unsold parcels comprise most of what the BLM attempted to sell under phase one of Lincoln County Land Act. Developers snubbed their noses at both parcels. They said at the time they were concerned that building homes on the land would require potentially millions of dollars in infrastructure, and they also were concerned that environmental groups had filed multiple appeals to force the federal government to stop the sales.

Environmentalists argued that the impact of large-scale development in the desert of southern Lincoln County had not been adequately assessed.

At least one of those appeals and a subsequent lawsuit are still unresolved.

"That's still out there pending," said Christopher Krupp, staff attorney for the Western Land Exchange Project, based in Seattle. "There's not only an administrative appeal, we filed a lawsuit. We're waiting for a decision."

Krupp, whose group is working with the Center for Biological Diversity and the Committee for the High Desert on the appeal, said he was surprised that the BLM was moving forward with the sale.

BLM representatives said they have to move forward with at least an attempt to sell the land because of the congressional mandate.

"The lawsuit is still in place," said Dan Netcher, BLM project manager for the sales. "We have not heard back from the administrative side, the Board of Land Use Appeals, or the federal court situation.

"Basically, we are going ahead because it is a congressional mandate that we attempt to sell this property by a certain date," he said.

BLM Ely Field Office staff will, upon the successful sale of the two unsold parcels from phase one, prepare to sell the remaining acreage to be offered. A sale date for the remaining public lands has not been scheduled.

For more information about the August sale, contact Netcher at (775) 289-1800.

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