

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO FEDERAL LAND

## AND WHY YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT IT

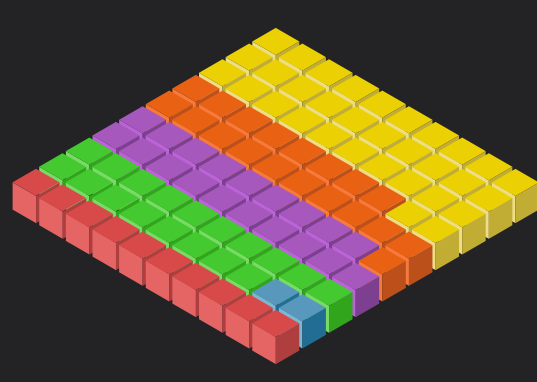
### What is Federal Land?

In the United States, all land is ultimately controlled by some government department. Even the land around your house is subject to government control. The job of managing this land is split between the local, state, and federal levels of government.

When we talk about "Federal Land," we are referring to land that is under the direct control and management of the federal government. This type of land, even though it is physically located within state borders, is not subject to state government control or laws. This effectively gives complete control of the land to the federal government.

### How is it Used?

Federal land is used for all sorts of things. Some of it is used for national parks like Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon. Some of it is sold to mining and logging companies to produce resources. It forms the reservations that native populations were banished to. Most of the land goes to agriculture, with both crops and livestock using the land to grow.

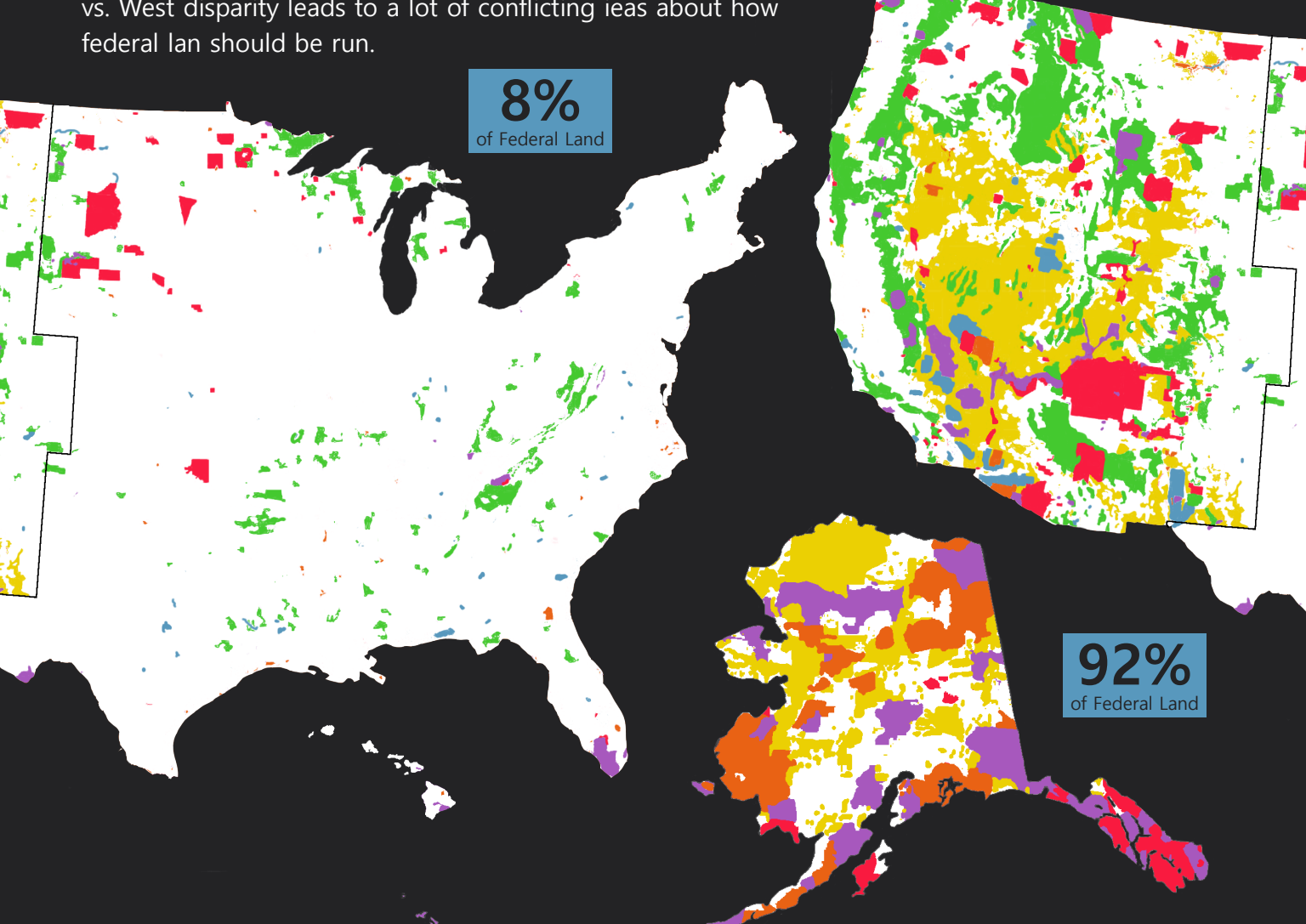


#### Fun Fact

In 2019 the US government made **4.2 billion dollars** from renting federal land to oil and natural gas companies.

### Where is all this Land?

While there is some federal land in every state, the distribution is far from equal. The western states contain 92% of all federal land, but only make up 49% of the country's area. This East vs. West disparity leads to a lot of conflicting ideas about how federal land should be run.



### Observations from Ohio

If you're from the East like me, almost all of the federal land you've encountered have likely been national parks and national forests. Your connection to this land is probably limited to family camping trips when you were a kid. And you may be asking yourself "What's the big deal?" It may surprise you to hear that federal land is the subject of countless political debates. Federal land is not just for recreation, and it is hugely important in thousands of Americans' lives. Let's explore some of the ways people are harmed every day by the decisions made regarding federal land.

#### Fun Fact

Ohio State University is a "Land Grant" university, meaning it was funded through the donation of federal land from the federal government. The land in this deal was acquired by **forcing out members of over 250 tribes** who had lived on the land for centuries.

80.1% Federally Owned



### No State Nevada

Moving to Nevada? Finding a place to live might shock you. Despite having over 70 million acres of land, the government owns most of it, leaving just 14 million acres for residents.

This false land shortage is driving up rent and pricing many Nevadans out of the housing market, while opening the land to for profit companies to extract its resources.

#### Fun Fact

The US government used this land when setting off **928 nuclear bombs**, which studies have linked to over 10,000 cases of thyroid cancer and countless deaths.

### Atrophying Alaska

The federal government's practice of selling land to logging, mining, and oil companies in Alaska poses a significant risk to the state's land, and there is little Alaska can do about it. These ongoing risks include:

Tongass National Forest - 9.2 million acres  
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge - 1.6 million acres  
Lands Package - 448,000 acres  
National Petroleum Reserve - 13.35 million acres  
Public Land Orders - 1.5 million acres  
Bering Sea Western Interior - 1.8 million acres  
Izembek National Wildlife Refuge - 417,500 acres

60.9% Federally Owned

#### Fun Fact

The Mining Law of 1872, still in effect, allows mining companies to pay **less than \$5 per acre** to open a mine on federal land. The average cost of an acre of private land in Alaska is \$15,753.

### Sources & Further Reading

[A Vast Liquidation of Public Lands Is Underway in Alaska](#)

[Arctic National Wildlife Refuge 101](#)

[Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data](#)

[How Federal Policy Prices Nevadans Out of Housing](#)

[Interactive: See the Lands Sold to Fund Ohio's Land "Grant" Universities](#)

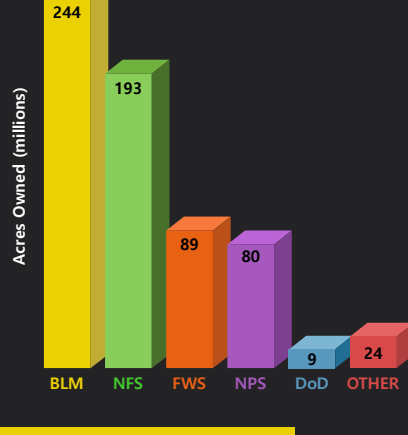
[Multinational Mining Corporations Are Exploiting U.S. Taxpayers](#)

[The Mining Law of 1872: Digging a Little Deeper](#)

[Revenues and Disbursements from Oil and Natural Gas Production on Federal Lands](#)

### Who's in Charge?

There are a ton of agencies that manage federal land, but there are five main players:



#### Bureau of Land Management

The BLM manages a wide range of activities, including mining, grazing, and outdoor recreation. They sort of do it all.

#### National Forest Service

The NFS is in charge of the forests grasslands, using them for timber harvesting, grazing, and recreation.

#### Fish and Wildlife Service

The FWS is responsible for managing federal land that is critical to wildlife conservation, including national wildlife refuges, fish hatcheries, and other protected areas.

#### National Parks Service

The NPS runs all the country's national parks, monuments, and historic sites.

#### Department of Defense

The DoD has federal land in the form of military facilities and storage.

#### Other

Includes the Bureau of Indian Affairs\*, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Energy, the Tennessee Valley Association, NASA, National Science Foundation, and more.

\*While the Bureau of Indian Affairs manages 55 million acres of federal land, they are largely omitted from this infographic as the additional ownership of the tribes causes them to be a whole other issue that deserves its own explanation.