Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform (FLAIR) Act: Improving Real Property Stewardship

Since 2003, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has repeatedly designated ‘Managing Federal Real Property’ one of the high-risk areas within the federal government most prone to waste, fraud and abuse. This activity is again on the list released by GAO on February 14, 2013 (GAO-13-283). One of the reasons cited by GAO is the fact that the government does not have a current, accurate inventory of the land it owns. The General Services Administration (GSA) collects data from at least 30 federal agencies, but its system has been criticized by GAO for being “unreliable and of limited usefulness” and “not current or reliable.” This point was underscored once again by GAO and GSA at a House Subcommittee hearing on February 2013, and a recent National Public Radio (NPR) report.

It is estimated that the government wastes $2 billion a year on some 77,000 unneeded buildings. As the Washington Post recently reported, the NPR story underestimates the problem, as the GSA inventory includes buildings only, and not land. The last official report on unneeded federal land (1997) indicated that the Bureau of Land Management alone is holding more than 3.4 million acres that had been identified for disposal through the agency’s land use planning process.

On the other hand, the government inefficiently maintains a plethora of land inventories that are inaccurate, out-of-date, single purpose, and non-interoperable. The inefficient and wasteful nature of the government’s current way of doing business was demonstrated by then-Interior Secretary Gale Norton’s 2005 testimony before the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee:

“...The Department currently uses 26 different financial management systems and over 100 different property systems. Employees must enter procurement transactions multiple times in different systems so that the data are captured in real property inventories, financial systems, and acquisition systems. This fractured approach is both costly and burdensome to manage.”

The Department of Defense has reported that it maintains more than 300 property management systems. This inefficiency should not be the case when a single, uniform, reliable, regularly maintained database is currently available through state-of-the-art geographic information systems (GIS) technology.

Representatives Ron Kind (D-WI) and Rob Bishop (R-UT) introduced the Federal Land Asset Inventory Reform (FLAIR) Act, H.R. 916, and has been reported favorably out of the House Committee on Natural Resources. In the Senate, a companion bill will soon be introduced by Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Mike Lee (R-UT), similar to S. 1153 in the 112th Congress.

This bill creates a single, federal multipurpose cadastre (a uniform Federal computer database), in accordance with standards recommended by the National Academy of Sciences. The bill also calls for an “inventory of inventories,” so that duplicate, wasteful activities can be identified and eliminated. The FLAIR Act will provide all agencies owning federal real property an improved accounting of their land assets. Such an inventory will assist in improved federal land management, resource conservation, environmental protection and utilization of real property, as well as identify property the federal government no longer needs to own.

ACTION REQUESTED:
NSPS respectfully urges Representatives to cosponsor H.R. 916, the FLAIR Act, with Representatives Kind and Bishop. To become a cosponsor, contact Natalie Mamerow in Representative Kind’s office at 5-5506, or Fred Ferguson in Representative Bishop’s office at 5-0453. NSPS respectfully urges Senators to cosponsor companion legislation with Senator Hatch. To become a cosponsor, contact John Tanner in Senator Hatch’s office at 4-5251. For more information, contact John Byrd, NSPS Lobbyist, at jbyrd@jmpa.us or (703) 787-6665.