

# 27,000 acres of public land near Las Vegas up for sale

By The New York Times

CARSON CITY, Nev. — The federal government is preparing to auction 27,000 acres of public land near Las Vegas estimated to be worth \$500 million to \$1 billion, with almost all of the proceeds to stay in Nevada instead of going to the Treasury.

Like many cities in the West, Las Vegas is surrounded by public land managed by the Interior Department.

The Bureau of Land Management has designated 55,000 acres of desert within a 460-square-mile zone around the city for eventual disposal to developers and local governments.

The government has been reluctant to sell public land in the past, because the proceeds went to the Treasury and neither the Interior Department nor Nevada gained anything.

Previously, the government

traded developable public land near Las Vegas to developers in exchange for environmentally sensitive private lands elsewhere in Nevada.

But these exchanges have become mired in controversy, with federal audits finding that the government received far less than equal value in many exchanges.

Rep. John Ensign, a Republican, has said the government lost nearly \$40 million in the last two years in land trades with developers.

Now, under a bill enacted by Congress and signed by President Clinton, the government will sell the public land at auction. Eighty-five percent of the proceeds will go to acquire environmentally sensitive private land in Nevada and to improve parks and recreation areas around Las Vegas; 10 percent to the Southern Nevada Water Authority to build drinking-water pipelines; and 5 percent to schools

in Nevada.

The Las Vegas office of the Bureau of Land Management is already fielding calls from potential bidders, said a public affairs officer, Phillip Guerrero.

Under the legislation, the airport authority in Las Vegas is picking up about 5,000 acres in its noise-abatement area at no cost.

Local governments can also acquire parks and rights-of-way for water, sewage and flood-control projects at no cost. And more than 20,000 acres are expected to be sold to local governments for only \$10 an acre for other purposes.

That leaves as much as 27,000 acres of public land that is expected to be auctioned to developers for \$18,000 to \$37,000 per acre. The land will be sold in parcels of five to 2,500 acres.

Each parcel will be offered with minimum bids set by a government-approved appraisal.