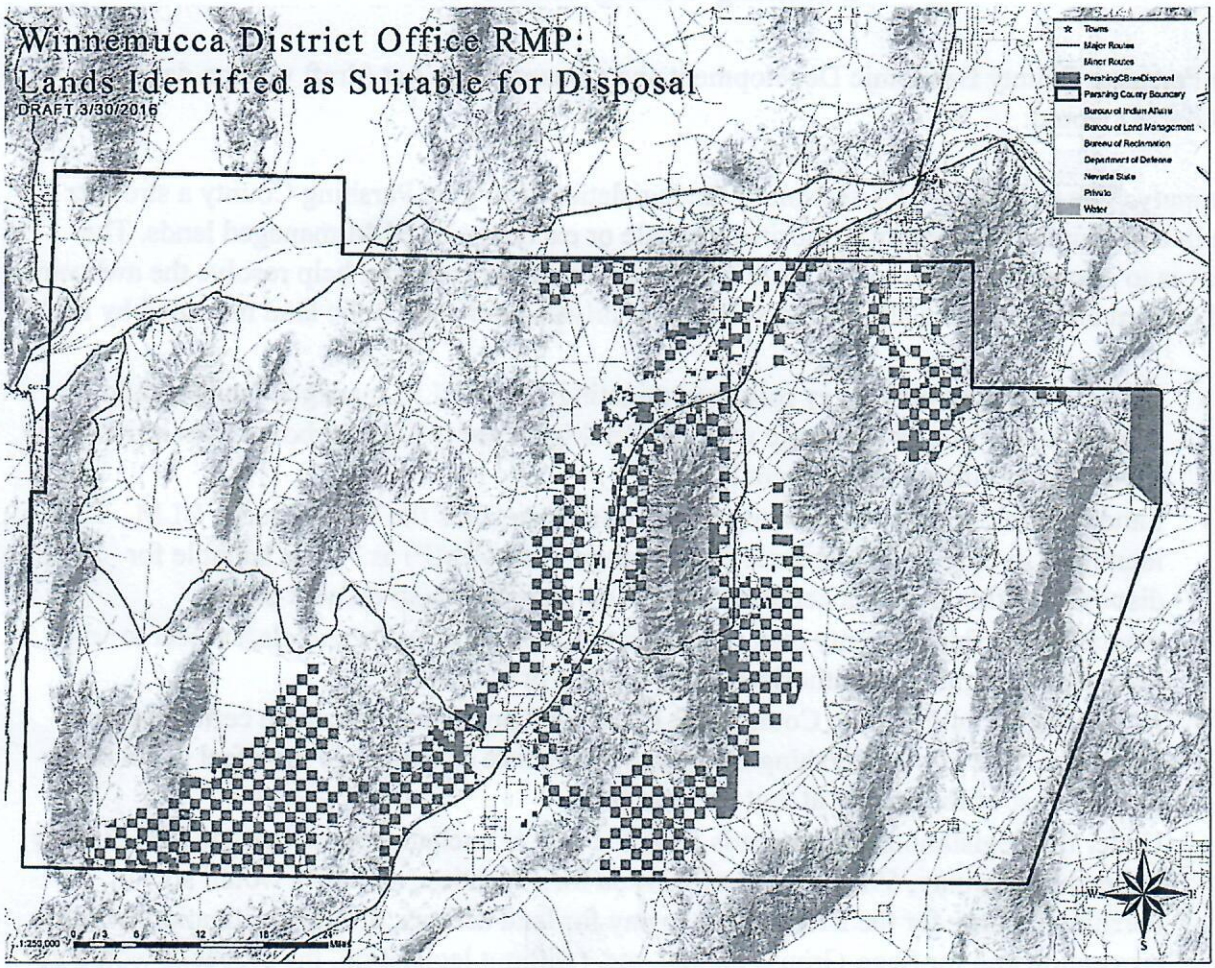
BLM Land Sales and Exchanges Fact Sheet
Pershing County Lands Bill

The Pershing County Economic Development and Conservation Act (draft version dated 4/14/2016) would:

Summary: The purpose of this section of the legislation is to give Pershing County a stronger role in determining the county's priorities for sale or exchange of BLM managed lands. The intent is to allow the county to put more land on the local tax rolls and help resolve the awkward land pattern created by the alternating sections of private land and public land managed by BLM.

- Give Pershing County a key role in nominating which BLM managed lands should be offered up for sale or exchange with the Pershing County Checkerboard Resolution Zone (20 miles on either side of the railroad).
- Lands eligible for sale or exchange would be those lands the Winnemucca BLM identified in their 2015 Resource Management Plan (RMP) as "lands suitable for disposal" within the Checkerboard resolution area. (see map on next page).
- Annually, Pershing County may nominate to the BLM specific parcels, subject to valid and existing rights and authorized uses, for sale or exchange.
- At the request of Pershing County, the BLM shall postpone or exclude certain parcels from sale. This allows Pershing County to stop a sale or exchange they feel is not in the best interest of the county at that point in time.
- Under this legislation, the proceeds from the sale or exchange would go to: 10% directly to Pershing County, 5% the State of Nevada for education, and 85% would stay in Pershing County for the BLM to use to pay for land actions, drought mitigation, wildlife prevention and for Sage-Grouse habitat, etc. (without legislation, the proceeds would go into the US General Treasury and would NOT stay within the County or the State).



Questions and Answers

What about lands outside of the Checkerboard Lands Resolution Area? Will these be available for sale or exchange as well?

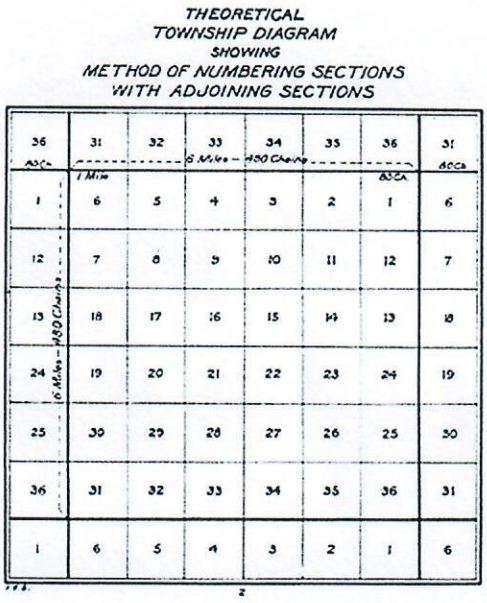
Yes, but not as a part of this bill. There are lands outside the checkerboard that the RMP designates as suitable for disposal. Exchanges or sales of these lands would be done under regular BLM policies spelled out in the Federal Land and Policy Management Act, and not pursuant to this bill.

Can the BLM add or subtract lands identified for disposal in the Winnemucca RMP?

Yes, the BLM can amend the management plan and change the lands identified for disposal through a public plan amendment process.

What are Checkerboard Lands? Where did they come from?

Western lands were surveyed in a grid with Townships (running north and south) and Ranges (running east and west). Within a Township and Range grid were 36 sections (one mile squares). This alternating pattern of private and public lands, called checkerboard lands can be seen in the map above. The diagram below shows how these sections are numbered.



Transcontinental railroads were very important for the growth of the nation. The Pacific Railroad Act of 1864 gave land grants to the railroad companies to compensate them for building the railroads. In order to encourage the construction of railroads across the nation, the federal government offered "checkerboard" land grants to railroad companies, consisting of alternate sections (the odd numbered sections) for twenty miles on each side of the railroad right-of-way. Additionally the railroads were granted all of the mineral rights under those lands. This checkerboard land ownership pattern, established in the 1870's, still stretches across Nevada in a broad band on each side of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Over the years, some of the railroad lands were sold to individuals or other companies but in Pershing County much of the original checkerboard pattern is still there.

The alternating private and public land sections can make use of these lands challenging and difficult for development. This legislation gives Pershing County and the BLM some tools to help consolidate some of these lands into larger, more manageable blocks of private and public land. Some of the resulting consolidated lands would be for development, whereas blocks of public lands would be beneficial for recreation, wildlife, grazing, mining, etc.