

# Govt. Selling Oil-Rich Land For \$2.50 an Acre

The U.S. Interior Department is giving away 82,000 acres of oil-shale-rich Colorado land for a mere \$2.50 an acre — land that could be sold for up to \$200 an acre on the open market.

Incredibly, the outrageous \$2.50-per-acre price tag was set up by a mining law passed in 1872 — 115 years ago!

"This is preposterous!" protests Sid Taylor, research director for the National Taxpayers' Union.

Under the old mining law, people were given the right to stake a claim to certain government lands and their mineral deposits. Big oil companies including Exxon, Tosco and Union Oil have been buying these old claims which have enabled them to purchase the oil shale land from the government at \$2.50 an acre.

"But nobody today is going to go out and try to develop oil shale — not with oil prices the way they are and not with technology the way it is now," declares Karl Gawell, a legislative representative for the Public Lands and Energy Division of the National Wildlife Federation (NWF).

The NWF tried to block sale of the 82,000 acres — but failed. Now it's backing a proposal to stop sale of another 280,000 acres at \$2.50 an acre.

Back in the 1960s, the General Accounting Office



**Bureaucracy  
Runs Wild**

(GAO) looked at 41 sales of 3,000 acres of government land in Arizona and California — and found Uncle Sam got \$12,000, said Gawell. "Fair market value of the property was about \$1.1 million."

In most cases the buyers turned around and resold the land, he said.

The GAO concluded that large profits were being

made on the resale of the property — that instead of being sold to promote mining, as the law intended, they'd been sold "because someone wanted to build condominiums on the property," said Gawell.

Rio Blanco County, Colo., tax assessor Kelly Cockerill said that oil-shale land is now worth as much as \$200 an acre.

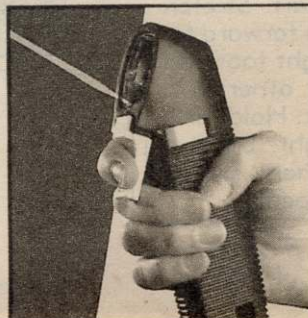
Rep. Nick J. Rahall 2nd (D-W. Va.), chairman of the House Interior Subcommittee on Mining and Natural Resources, is introducing legislation prohibiting the Interior Department from conveying any more land to holders of claims on the other 280,000 acres. He said: "If there's no Congressional action, we'll see these lands or the vast majority of the 280,000 acres transferred to private interests for a mere \$2.50 an acre."

— PAUL EINSTEIN

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