

VII. Conclusion

The intent of this report is to provide a starting point for discussion about trust land management within and among Western states that face a common set of management challenges. Throughout the West, many trust managers are seeking ways to adapt and diversify trust portfolios, improve management strategies, take advantage of explosive growth throughout the West, and, at the same time, reflect the needs and desires of a rapidly-changing population and contemporary environmental realities.

The unique history of these lands – and their distinctive trust mandate – confronts trust managers with challenges that are quite different than those facing other public land managers. Demands on schools and other public institutions, combined with growth pressures on trust lands and public concern with the protection of significant conservation values associated with those lands are rapidly expanding the mix of constituencies and concerns that must be addressed by trust managers. In many states, these pressures have brought trust management into the public eye in an unprecedented manner.

These changes create a critical need – and a real opportunity – to explore means of generating trust revenues that serve the needs of trust beneficiaries while increasing the compatibility of trust activities with the economic futures of Western communities and the preservation of important public values associated with trust lands. As this report has discussed, the historic trust responsibility associated with the management of these lands provides sufficient flexibility to allow trust managers to meet these challenges. Indeed, it may even mandate trust managers to do so as the custodians of a perpetual, intergenerational trust.

Many trust managers are already exploring innovative management practices in search of win-win solutions that produce larger, more predictable revenue streams for beneficiaries, and which balance the public values associated with the preservation of healthy landscapes, urban open space, and better planning for growth with their fiduciary responsibilities as trust managers. As we have discussed, this exploration could benefit from focused investments in research and policy analysis to assist the development of TAM strategies, tools for planning, disposition, and conservation, BMPs for collaborative planning and joint venture arrangements, and key information such as biophysical inventories and educational funding structures, among other issues. Taken together, this information could significantly broaden the range of information and policy options available to trust managers and stakeholders as they seek to improve state trust land management in the American West.