

## In Defense of Public Lands: The Case Against Privatization and Transfer

**Steven Davis**

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Public lands are a gift for which all Americans should be grateful, and Steven Davis, a professor of political science and environmental studies, believes these lands should remain public. He builds a thorough argument in his impassioned treatise, *In Defense of Public Lands*, in which he views the public-versus-private debate from both sides.

Davis begins by dramatically calling attention to the vast amount of public land in the United States—almost thirty-seven percent of total land mass. He then contrasts the ownership of this land by state and federal governments with the desire to privatize it.

The author does an admirable job of positing the arguments of privatization proponents before devoting the remainder of the book to building a strong case for keeping land in public hands. The economic argument is particularly compelling; the book cites “meticulously calculated ROI studies” from the Trust for Public Land, indicating that the ROI for state land acquisition programs ranges from 400 to 1,100 percent. Davis doesn't stop there; he also presents lucid ecological and political arguments in support of public lands.

Davis acknowledges that the public-versus-private land debate has entered a “new era.” In what may be the most heartfelt section of the book, the author enumerates specific ways in which public lands must be defended against those seeking privatization; these arguments include “frame public lands as a patriotic imperative,” “seize the historical narrative,” and “build as broad a coalition as possible.” The book ends with an insightful assessment of “public lands over the long term,” as well as an elegantly written concluding section that answers the question, “What Are Our Public Lands For?”

This is a convincing and fervent plea for the country's public lands, which the author calls “a unique treasure and the envy of the world” to be preserved.

**BARRY SILVERSTEIN** (July/August 2018)

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