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**Subject:** effects of National Monument ownership

I'm sure some of you have seen this. But for those who haven't....

Tri-City Herald  
<http://www.hanfordnews.com/2001/0810-2.html>

Report asks DOE to cede Hanford monument land  
This story was published Fri, Aug 10, 2001

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

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**EDMC**

A federal report recommends the Department of Energy turn over ownership of the Hanford Reach National Monument to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Such a move would severely cut DOE's payments-in-lieu-of-taxes to governments and schools in Benton, Franklin and Grant counties.

"That was kind of a shock," said Grant County Commissioner LeRoy Allison, who learned of the report Thursday.

DOE tentatively and partly agreed with the report's recommendation but plans to study it until December before discussing it with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Any transfer of ownership would take 18 to 24 months, DOE told its Inspector General's office.

"We'll be conducting an analysis. ... It's premature to say what the analysis will conclude," said DOE spokesman Tom Welch.

DOE's Inspector General's office examined the administration of the Hanford Reach National Monument and sent its recommendation to DOE officials in late July.

Former President Clinton created the monument last year -- turning roughly 265 square miles of the 560-square-mile Hanford reservation into a nature reserve.

The monument's area consists of Hanford's almost pristine outer security buffer, which includes the Wahluke Slope, the Hanford Reach, the Fitzner-Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology Reserve and Hanford's northwest corner, dubbed the McGee Ranch area.

DOE owns the land. The Fish and Wildlife Service is in charge of managing it for DOE and recently began a two-year effort to create a master management plan.

DOE's Inspector General's recommended transferring administrative control \* meaning ownership -- of 223 square miles of the monument to Fish and Wildlife.

efforts, the report said.

The ALE and McGee Ranch are in Benton County. The Wahluke Slope is mostly in Grant County with some of it in Franklin County. The Reach is in all three counties.

Payments-in-lieu-of-taxes are a way to compensate counties for lost property taxes on land owned by the federal government. The Inspector General's report said DOE pays about \$3.4 million a year in these payments to the three counties.

Figures from Grant, Franklin and Benton counties say Hanford gave them \$3.196 million last year.

That breaks down to slightly more than \$2.5 million to Benton County, roughly \$56,000 to Franklin County and slightly more than \$631,000 to Grant County.

DOE "estimated that it pays 10 times more in payments-in-lieu-of-taxes than the Department of Interior would if it controlled the land," the Inspector General's report said.

The report later said DOE "should not hold land that is managed by another department solely to provide more financial assistance to local governments."

The potential loss of this revenue -- which is distributed among local governments, school districts and fire districts -- bothers Allison and Benton County Commissioner Leo Bowman, who also learned of the report Thursday.

"This will become a major concern of local governments. ... That's a quarter of a million dollars to our school in Mattawa -- annually," Allison said.

Bowman said: "If the Department of Energy is engaged in an effort to relieve itself of its responsibilities, I totally oppose it."

Allison noted that Clinton's 2000 proclamation to set up the monument said the designation "does not revoke any ... (previous) appropriation," and also said "valid existing rights" would be kept.

He argued this means the payments-in-lieu-of-taxes can't be shifted away. "That's a pretty good guarantee," Allison said.

According to the Inspector General's report, DOE partly agrees with the recommendations.

DOE would agree to turn over the McGee Ranch and the Wahluke Slope. But the agency wants to hang on to the ALE because research done there fits in with DOE's broader science mission.

Also, DOE is not ready to accept the Inspector General's payments-in-lieu-of-taxes calculations, and wants to recrunch those numbers.