



arizona business & education coalition

ABEC ISSUE BRIEF:

STATE TRUST LAND REFORM “CONSERVING ARIZONA INITIATIVE”

REQUESTED ABEC ACTION:

The ABEC Board is requested to take a formal position in support of the initiative.

BACKGROUND & CORE ISSUE:

At statehood in 1912, Arizona was granted nearly 11 million acres of state land, to be held in trust for 14 beneficiaries. The largest beneficiary is K-12 public education which receives 87% of the trust revenue. In the 1990's, the Arizona Preserve Initiative was passed allowing the State Land Dept. to sell certain lands for conservation purposes instead of strictly on the basis of the highest bidder. While this allowed some lands to be conserved it also drew opposition on the grounds that the trust was not realizing its full potential from land sales. For the past four years a coalition of development, education, municipal, rural and conservation interests has been working to craft a compromise. The core issue of the group has been finding a way to increase the value of the trust while allowing for meaningful conservation.

CURRENT STATUS:

Signature gathering is now underway. The initiative amends the Arizona constitution and must have 183,917 valid signatures by July 6, 2006 to make the ballot.

SUPPORTERS:

- The Initiative is supported by a coalition of groups including the Nature Conservancy, the AEA, APS and Valley Partnership.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR

- The initiative is coalition based and will allow significant parcels of state lands to be conserved throughout the state.
- Passage of the initiative will provide more revenue for the state land trust and, thereby, more funding for the trust's beneficiaries.
- The initiative contains provisions for cooperative land planning between the State Land Department and local communities and establishes a Board of Trustees to provide accountability.

OPPONENTS:

- Arizona Cattlemen and grazing interests, some legislative opposition and pockets of individual opposition also exist. There is no known broadly-organized opposition campaign at this time.

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

- The initiative will create economic hardships for cattle and grazing interests and conserve valuable lands that would otherwise generate significant trust income.
- Passage of the initiative as a compromise measure will reduce the pressure to pass reforms with more extensive conservation measures later on.
- The initiative will accelerate the sale of state lands and increase urban sprawl, thereby aggravating transportation problems and reducing the investment capital available for redevelopment and reinvestment in infill areas.

IS THE ISSUE CONSISTENT WITH ABEC'S PRINCIPLES OF AGREEMENT?

- Although ABEC's Principles of Agreement are silent on the specific subject of state trust lands, the initiative is generally compatible with the language on "General Fund, Revenues & School Finance."

ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS, CONSIDERATIONS & DISCUSSION:

The proponents of the initiative are moving aggressively forward with signature gathering and building a grassroots network. While organized opposition is sparse, some groups have taken a "neutral" position or are in a "wait and see" pattern for now. There is credible speculation that some legislators may introduce a referendum to place a competing measure on the ballot to mollify the opposition or create voter confusion.

Part of the initiative's appeal is that the status quo is viewed as unacceptable to many (both supporters and some opponents). From an education standpoint, the initiative, if passed, would increase funds through the accelerated sale of and revenue from state lands. If the debate centers on other issues then there are credible arguments on both sides.

[ABEC Issue Brief – State Land Initiative (11/17/2005)]