

Federal Land Grabbers Never Quit

IF ALL of the land owned by the United States government were in one block, it would equal the land area of the 26 states east of the Mississippi river, plus all of Texas and Louisiana.

Federal land ownership is relatively small in Oklahoma, but Uncle Sam still is our largest single land owner. Through various agencies, he holds 1.4 million acres, 3% per cent of the state.

Some people are disturbed by aliens buying land here, but their holdings are small compared to proposed additional land grabs by the federal government. These amount to more than losses of prime crop land taken for houses, shopping centers, roads and other non-farm uses, and federal ownership removes the property from local taxation.

The federal takeover does not always succeed. Yet, federal land grabbers keep coming back, sometimes armed with power of eminent domain. Nevertheless, private land owners have won a few notable victories in recent months.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has dropped its plans to convert

36,000 acres of bottom land along Deep Fork river into a wildlife preserve because farmers in central Oklahoma put up a stiff fight.

Landowners in Harmon county recently won a battle with Uncle Sam over title to the south half of the bed of Red river.

In February, a bill to provide matching funds for land use planning was defeated in Congress, due to farm organization opposition.

The 1979 legislature enacted a law intended to make it difficult for the federal government to acquire rural land in Oklahoma.

The law says federal agencies may not acquire land outside of cities and towns without consent of the legislature, except for military purposes, post offices and public buildings, irrigation and drainage projects, and a few other specified uses.

Considering the extremely broad definition of navigable streams and adjacent wetlands used by the government, the exceptions might make it unnecessary for Uncle Sam ever to ask permission.

A federal proposal that was de-

clared "dead" after the above law in Congress and remains a top priority project of the National Park Service for 1980.

It is the "Tallgrass Prairie Reserve," involving 95,000 acres in the lush bluestem pasture country of Osage county, plus 225,000 acres in the Flint Hills of Kansas, about 50 square miles.

Stated purpose is "to fill a gap in the National Park System, which contains no significant reserve of tallgrass prairie."

The movement has support of environmentalist organizations, but significant public demand for the opportunity to look at prairie vegetation as it was centuries ago has not appeared.

In fact, ranchers who oppose the move say that it would be very boring to tourist to go out and look at grass growing.

If present trends continue, it is quite possible that by the end of this century, all land use could be brought under federal control, and land ownership as we Oklahomans know it might disappear.