



Federal Public Land Transfer Through Tax Policy: Risks to Kisatchie National Forest, Grant Parish, and Louisiana's Wildlife Resources

(as of May 13, 2026)

Introduction

The Grant Parish Restoration Plan proposes to amend the Internal Revenue Code to expand eligibility under the federal New Markets Tax Credit program. The proposal is framed as an effort to support rural economic development in low-income areas, particularly in parishes and counties with a high percentage of federal land ownership where traditional development opportunities may be limited.

Embedded within that broader tax framework proposal is a separate and significant provision directing the transfer of federal public lands in Louisiana.

The proposal would include transferring all of the Kisatchie National Forest holding in Grant Parish, which is about 140,000 acres and the equivalent of nearly 24% of the Kisatchie National Forest. The recommendation is a transfer to the Grant Parish School Board and Grant Parish Police Jury. This proposal was discussed in the Grant Parish Policy Jury Meeting of April 9, 2026 as the "Grant Parish Restoration Plan." <https://gppj.org/meeting-minutes>. On May 8, the Police Jury made a statement on their Facebook page that they were not seeking this proposal nor endorsing it at this time. It is on the agenda for their May 14, 2026 meeting.

Placing a public land conveyance inside a broader tax and economic development bill risks reducing the visibility of a significant public lands policy decision, one that carries long-term implications for conservation, public access, and the future of wildlife habitat in Louisiana.

Proposed Legislative Structure and Approach

The proposal for Grant Parish in Louisiana combines several distinct policy objectives:

- expansion of federal tax incentives in rural areas
- transfer and redevelopment of federal correctional facilities
- conveyance of National Forest System land to local governing authorities

Though the federal public land transfer may not be the central focus, it is one of its most consequential components. It removes land from federal public ownership and places it under local control, where future use decisions will be governed by a different set of priorities and protections.

This approach reframes a public lands issue as an economic development measure, without fully addressing the long-term consequences of removing land from the National Forest System.

Kisatchie National Forest: A Public Resource

Kisatchie National Forest is Louisiana's only national forest and represents a critical part of the state's natural resource base. It provides large, contiguous forest habitat across central Louisiana, supports public access for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation, protects watersheds, and is managed under long-standing, science-based federal frameworks.

Just as important, Kisatchie is part of the identity of Grant Parish. Many residents live, work, and raise families in this area specifically because of the forest, its open space, access to public land, and the quality of life that comes with it. This is not idle land. It is used, valued, and relied upon by the public every day.

Loss of Federal Protection and Long-Term Stability

The proposed conveyance would remove these lands from the National Forest System. With that removal comes the loss of federal protections that currently guide how the land is managed, including national forest planning requirements, environmental review processes, and consistent multiple-use management standards.

While the proposal may require a local forest management and public access plan, those provisions are not equivalent to federal oversight. They do not provide the same level of consistency, durability, or accountability. Management priorities can shift over time, and once the land leaves federal ownership, those long-term safeguards are no longer assured.

Broad Use Authority and Development Pressure

The proposed public land conveyance is to be used for a range of "public purposes," including:

- Forestry
- Conservation
- Recreation
- Community development
- Economic development
- Energy generation

This is broad language. It does not prioritize conservation or place meaningful limits on development. It creates flexibility that could just as easily lead to land conversion and fragmentation as it could to habitat protection.

Current Louisiana Context: Energy Development and Public Use

This flexibility must be considered in the context of current Louisiana law and policy. The state has recognized certain forms of energy development, including carbon capture and storage

(CCS), as a priority. Discussion of carbon capture and storage has become central to ongoing debates around eminent domain, landowner rights, and industrial development across rural Louisiana.

These are active and highly visible issues involving landowners, communities, and local governments. Concerns about long-term environmental impacts, water resources, and loss of control over land use continue to shape that discussion.

Within that framework, the inclusion of “energy generation” as a proposed use introduces real uncertainty. It creates a pathway for future energy-related infrastructure or development to be justified under a broad interpretation of public purpose or priority. Once removed from federal ownership, these lands would no longer be subject to the same federal standards that currently guide land use decisions.

No Safeguards Against Future Disposition

One of the most significant concerns in this proposal is what it does not include. There is no clear provision preventing the future sale, lease, or further transfer of these lands beyond the initial conveyance.

Once ownership is transferred, the long-term status of the land becomes uncertain. Without explicit protections, there is nothing to ensure that these lands remain public, remain accessible, or remain managed for conservation purposes. That uncertainty alone creates risk, not just for habitat, but for the public trust.

Impacts to Wildlife and Habitat

Kisatchie National Forest supports large-scale habitat that is increasingly limited across Louisiana. Its value lies not only in the land itself, but in its size, continuity, and coordinated management.

Breaking that system into smaller, locally controlled parcels introduces long-term risks, including:

- Habitat fragmentation
- Reduced consistency in forest management
- Increased pressure for development or land conversion
- Loss of landscape-scale conservation benefits

These impacts may not be immediate, but they are lasting.

These national forest lands contain thousands of acres of beautiful longleaf pine. The diversity of plants and animals on the Grant Parish national forest lands is remarkable. It is habitat for threatened, endangered and rare species, including the red-cockaded woodpecker. The Louisiana pearlshell mussel is found only in Grant Parish and Rapides Parish.

A Precedent That Extends Beyond Grant Parish

This proposal does not exist in isolation. If federal public lands can be transferred through broader economic or tax legislation, it establishes a precedent that could be applied elsewhere.

Such a shift would move public land policy away from long-term stewardship and toward incremental transfer. Public lands, once removed from federal ownership, are rarely returned.

Local Perspective and Broader Public Interest

It is important to recognize that this proposal has gained support within Grant Parish. Many residents see it as an opportunity to improve economic conditions, increase local revenues, and gain greater control over the future of their community.

That perspective is understandable.

Grant Parish, like many rural areas, has faced long-standing economic challenges. Efforts to improve access to federal programs, attract investment, and strengthen local tax bases are legitimate priorities. The desire for local control and economic stability is not misplaced.

However, the benefits being discussed are largely prospective and dependent on future decisions that are not defined. At the same time, the risks associated with transferring federal public land are immediate and permanent.

It is also important to recognize that the lands in question are not owned by Grant Parish, they are part of the National Forest System and are held in trust for all citizens. Decisions regarding those lands carry broader responsibility beyond parish boundaries.

Many Grant Parish residents value Kisatchie National Forest not for its potential as a financial asset, but for what it already provides:

- Public access to hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation
- Open space and quality of life
- Long-term stability in land management
- Protection of wildlife habitat

These values are not speculative. They exist today.

The question is not whether Grant Parish should benefit from economic development. The question is whether that development should come through the permanent transfer of public lands and the uncertainty that follows.

Louisiana Wildlife Federation Cannot Support Transfer of National Forest

The Louisiana Wildlife Federation has long stood for the protection of wildlife, wildlife habitat, and the responsible stewardship of our state's natural resources. That mission has guided our

work across decades of policy, management, and conservation efforts. Support for public access and the people's right to enjoy our natural resources is fundamental to the organization's goals.

This proposal runs counter to those principles.

The economic outcomes described in support of this proposal, whether reduced taxes, increased salaries, or expanded local revenue, are not guaranteed and will depend on future decisions and market conditions. What is guaranteed, however, is the permanent transfer of public land and the loss of the protections that currently govern its use.

While the stated goal of supporting Grant Parish is understandable, the mechanism proposed introduces long-term risks that outweigh its intended benefits. The transfer of National Forest System land out of federal ownership weakens established conservation safeguards, creates uncertainty around future land use, and opens the door to development pressures that are not aligned with the protection of wildlife habitat.

It also fails to provide assurances that these lands will remain protected or even remain public in the future.

Many residents of Grant Parish value Kisatchie National Forest not as a commodity, but as a defining part of their community and quality of life. That perspective reflects the broader public interest these lands were intended to serve.

The Louisiana Wildlife Federation will continue to advocate for the protection of Louisiana's wildlife resources and the public lands that sustain them. For these reasons, this proposal should be opposed. The long-term health of our forests, our wildlife, and our public trust resources depends on maintaining these lands under stable, conservation-driven management for future generations.