

Idaho legislator to unveil proposed constitutional amendment protecting public lands

State Sen. Ben Adams aims for proposal to go before Idaho voters in 2026 general election



A Republican state senator from Nampa said he will introduce a proposed amendment to the Idaho Constitution that would prevent the state of Idaho from selling any future public lands granted or obtained from the federal government.

Sen. Ben Adams, R-Nampa, said he will introduce the proposed constitutional amendment at the beginning of the 2026 session of the Idaho Legislature, which begins in January.

He hopes the amendment will go before voters in the November 2026 general election.

"The idea of selling public land really didn't sit well with me," Adams said in a phone interview Friday morning. "I have young kids and we like to hike and we like to fish, and our public lands here in Idaho have so many amazing places to do all of those things. Selling it off is just not an option in my mind."

Access to [public lands became a flashpoint this year](#) after U.S. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, introduced an unsuccessful proposal in Congress that would have allowed millions of acres of public land, including in Idaho, to be sold off to the highest bidder.

Lee ultimately removed his public lands sell off proposal from an earlier version of the so-called "Big Beautiful Bill" following a public backlash that included [opposition from within the Republican Party by U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch and U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson,](#) all R-Idaho.



How would the proposed public lands amendment in Idaho work?

If the amendment passes, it would create a new land trust and all future new public lands granted by or acquired from the federal government would be placed into that trust, Adams said.

The amendment would not change anything for the roughly 2.5 million acres of state endowment land Idaho already has, Adams said. Under the Idaho Constitution, existing state endowment lands are managed to secure the "[maximum long term financial return](#)" to the state and beneficiaries, which means the land can be sold. That's not changing.

Instead, the new amendment would apply to all new and future public lands that would be placed into a new trust created by the amendment. That land could not be sold.

"In this new land trust, there is no provision for maximum financial return," Adams said.

Instead, those new lands would be managed to allow for multiple uses, including recreation, timber harvest and grazing. Adams said revenue raised by grazing and timber harvest would support rural schools in communities that are surrounded by public lands and have a smaller property tax base.

As for the specifics of the amendment, Adams said he will unveil the text of the proposed constitutional amendment during a free, public kickoff event at noon on Aug. 15 at the Pine Cafe in the small mountain town of Pine, which is located in Elmore County and situated along the South Fork of the Boise River.

Adams picked the spot because he enjoys fishing in the area and Pine is surrounded by public lands, which guests will drive through and experience on their way to the kickoff event.

Adams, a retired U.S. Marine Corps sergeant who saw two combat tours in Afghanistan, said Idahoans have many different reasons for enjoying public lands.

"It's where I healed when I came back from deploying overseas," Adams said. "It's wide-open and you can be all alone. On public lands every man is a king, and it is the only place in the world you can do that. It's because it belongs to you, and it belongs to all of us."

What is the process for amending Idaho's constitution?

To pass, the proposed amendment to the Idaho Constitution must receive at least a two-thirds supermajority of support from both the Idaho Senate and the Idaho House of Representatives.

If that happens, the amendment would go before voters in the November 2026 general election, where it would require a simple majority vote to pass.

Although there is a high bar for amending the Idaho Constitution, Adams said support for public land crosses political lines and he is confident the amendment will receive the two-thirds support in both chambers of the Idaho Legislature.

"It's a huge issue given the times we are living in, and it's good to fight for something we all agree on," Adams said.

Public lands have near universal public support in Idaho

More than 60% of all land in Idaho is public land of some form, including U.S. Forest Service land and Bureau of Land Management land.

Public land, where Idahoans and visitors enjoy hunting, hiking, fishing, camping, snowmobiling, bird and wildlife watching, climbing, skiing and more, is extremely popular with Idaho voters.

In the wake of this year's proposed public lands sell off, a poll sponsored by Conservation Voters for Idaho found that 96% of all registered voters in Idaho [believe public lands should stay in public hands](#), the Idaho Capital Sun previously reported.

Adams told the Sun he began working on his proposed amendment at the end of this year's legislative session.

"At that point this idea had legs, but once Sen. Lee proposed selling off millions of acres of public lands, it gave this idea wings and I knew this was the right time to put it out," Adams said.