

The Ideal Situation is to have complete access to public lands with no restrictions but alas that is far from today's reality.

Today's Reality is that more and more public lands are being put behind man made barriers. These barriers come in the form of laws, regulations and rules that prohibit or limit many personal outdoor activities on public lands.

This is the biggest single issue facing many outdoor activities (recreational metal detecting, gold prospecting, fossil and mineral collecting, rock hounding, off road vehicles, etc). Access to public lands is not just a metal detecting issue but is also the single most important major issue for the many outdoor recreational activities.

Why are more and more public lands being put off limits to metal detectorist? Metal detectorist are being pushed off of public land because the hobby is considered to be destructive by many public land managers, archaeologist and nature preservationists.

Public land managers find that their many parks, school yards and ball fields are being heavily damaged by irresponsible detectorist. Many new detectorist have entered the hobby and have not taken the time to learn how to correctly recover a target from the turf. The result is that there is a great deal of damage caused to manicured public parks grass, ball fields, etc. All detectorists must afford the same consideration, care and non-destructive behavior toward public lands as he / she would towards their own lawn and property.

National, state and local historical sites have been plundered for profit by a small number of individuals without any regard to the historical value and significance to the public. Generally, these individuals plunder for profit and in some cases for their private collection.

Today, the metal detecting hobby is portrayed on TV on at least three different programs as a turn-on and go hobby. Some of the shows portray the hobby in a very negative light with destructive target removal techniques and with an emphasis on how much the target is worth (profit). When new potential detectorist view these shows they can be influenced by the bad habits and practices as seem on these shows. This can create the situation where a new detectorist may start practicing the hobby without any regards to the metal detecting environment, to property and the potential public value of objects being found.

There are many new retirees entering the population from lifetime careers who are looking for a hobby to occupy their free time. These new retirees see the metal detecting TV shows and decide to purchase a detector without any knowledge as to where and how to use the detector. Their only knowledge base about the hobby is the TV show and that knowledge is not enough to inform them of the right way or even the incorrect ways to practice the hobby. An inexperienced detectorist with no prior experience, knowledge and the lack of a personal mentor is a detectorist in trouble. This situation can cause the hobby a great deal of damage in the public eye.

In Summary. The lack of individual personal knowledge about how to properly use a detector and recover targets in a park setting is the single major cause of why public land managers limit or remove access. Plus, there are those individuals that use a metal detector to plunder historical sites. The plundering of historical sites brings forward the archaeologist and now you have a very large constituent of people, who will pressure public land managers to remove all access.

So how can metal detectorist gain greater access to public lands?

Local Involvement. The best way for metal detectorist to retain access to those public lands that are still open

in their community and to gain more access to public lands is to work with the local public land managers. Do not wait until a law or regulation is purposed or enacted; at that juncture it is probably too late. To change an existing law can be difficult without a lot of help from the U.S. metal detecting community or in some cases to hire legal help, which can be expensive. Getting the law changed is not an easy task.

All clubs need to have a conversation at their monthly meeting about public land access and how they as a club can make an impact. This should not be a one time event but must be an on going monthly conversation at their club business and board meetings.

A loud uniform voice must come from the local metal detecting club and this can be accomplished by becoming an intergraded part of the local public land management organization or the department's rule setting process. What this means is that there should be a number of volunteer club members who can be available to participate on how regulations and laws should be enacted. These volunteers need to be open minded about how to protect public lands but also gain support for metal detectorist and other recreational activities to have public access.

The club should seek out the local archaeologist organization and volunteer their services to help profile historical sites. This could develop into a good working relationship and may soften their (archaeologist) view about the metal detecting hobby and its participates.

The club should also team up with local law-enforcement and provide evidence search services at crime scenes. This is an excellent PR service and can be very beneficial to law enforcement.

Get the club in the local news services with PR stories about finding lost items for people or doing projects with other organizations. These type of activities can build support for metal detecting in the local community.

Advertise in the local newspaper about your club's monthly meeting so that new metal detectorist can gain knowledge about the club existence. Also provide a monthly or quarterly introduction to metal detecting class for the public though the local senior center.

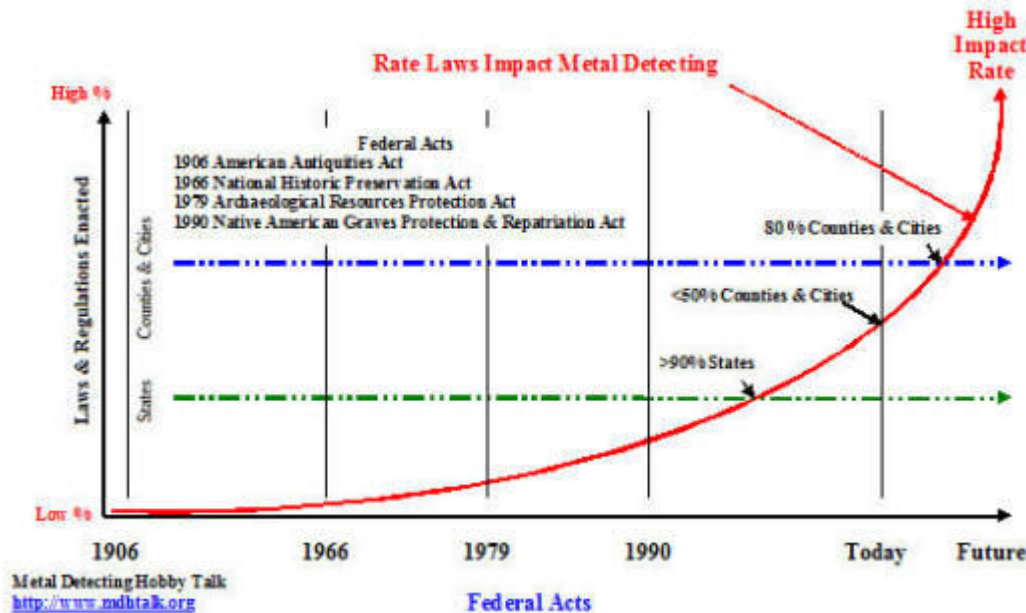
State Involvement. There also needs to be a well organized effort to influence state law and regulations for access to state land. To accomplish a state level effort will require that all of the recreational hobby groups in the state work together with a uniform voice to the state policy makers. This means that organizations / groups that represent metal detecting, gold prospecting, gem and mineral, fossil collecting and off road vehicle use, etc. must consider getting together to fight for public access with a single voice. These organization normally has members throughout the whole state and with these members all state legislators could be targeted by the hobby related constituents to gain their help and support on open access issues.

National Involvement. A very similar situation (as state involvement) needs to take place at the national level - all national organization with a public access issue should work together to create one loud voice for access. If this were to take place just think about all the voices across the 50 states that would be focused on one major issue in congress. Think leverage, leverage, leverage.

*Finally there are a number of non-profit groups working independently doing fire-fighting on the open access issue - this can be effective but not very efficient. These groups need to stop and look at the big picture. The groups need to operate as one voice on open access issues since they all have the same objective and mission which is to keep public access open to the recreationalist. View some of These Groups at: [Join the Fight](#)*

What is the future without change?

Graphic Disclaimer. The graphic below is based on an analysis of the federal acts' time line, state laws, and the review of many county and city regulations. The percentages are a bit of a guess when it comes to the level of law enacted in each entity (states, counties, cities, etc) however, the error factor is probably relatively small.



The vertical axis (Y) on the left represents Laws and Regulations enacted from the very LOW level percentage in 1906 on the bottom of the axis to a HIGH percentage at the top of the axis over time.

The horizontal axis (X) on the bottom represents time by using the various acts passed by congress since 1906. Keep in mind that these federal acts drive almost all state and local laws for access to public land. (National, State,

County, City, etc)

The conclusion you could take away from this graphic is that over the last 100 years access to public lands is being either eliminated or regulated by laws. This is being accelerated at a very rapid pace today and will be even more so in the future. More and more states, cities, county and school districts are placing limits on their public property against metal detecting. It is time to take real action by all clubs and metal detectorist across the country or our public land access will probably be gone in the next 25 years.

Summary. This article and other similar articles on the MDHTALK News website represent just one small voice for gaining greater access. It is hoped that detectorist and others will read these articles and add their voice to the public lands access troubles. So [Join the Fight](#)

Here are a list of articles on the MDHTALK website that can be read which will further enforce this article's theme.

**Is Recreational Metal Detecting on the Endangered List?** [Article Link](#)

**Is Recreational Metal Detecting on the Endangered List? ---Next Step** [Article Link](#)

**Thoughts on Responsible Metal Detecting** [Article Link](#)

**Metal Detecting Etiquette** [Article Link](#)