

Explore More—Land Policies

Directions: Listen to your teacher talk about the land policies developed under the Continental Congress. You will learn how these policies impacted American Indians' land. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

What major land policies were developed under the Continental Congress and why were they developed?

The Continental Congress had many issues to deal with in the early years. One of these issues was how to open up public land in the West. The population of the new country was growing and people wanted to move to and settle in the West. The government owned a vast amount of land beyond the original 13 colonies. By selling this public land in the West, the government could accomplish two goals. First, it would mean that the land would be settled and more firmly under the control of the United States. Second, selling public land was a good way to raise money to support the struggling young government.

The members of the Continental Congress knew they had to develop a plan so that people could buy land legally and in an orderly way. It passed the first land ordinance on May 20, 1785. This law is called the 1785 Land Ordinance. It included several requirements, including the following:

1. The land had to be measured and boundaries established before people could settle on it. (The process of measuring land and establishing boundaries is called "surveying.")
2. Each state was to have one surveyor under the direction of an official in the federal government.
3. The government had to come up with a standard land unit.

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The 1785 Land Ordinance also required every town to set aside some land for public schools. The 1785 Land Ordinance had some unpopular features. For one thing, it required that people pay cash for the land. People also had to buy this land from a land office. At first, the land office was in New York City. Later it was moved to Philadelphia.

In 1800, President John Adams approved a new public land law. According to this law, people no longer had to pay cash in full. The law also allowed the sale of land closer to where the land was located.

In 1803, President Jefferson added 500 million acres of public land with the Louisiana Purchase. Over the next 10 years, Congress added new districts, each of which had a land office.

What western lands were sold?

Lands were surveyed and sold in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

What was the Northwest Ordinance of 1787?

The Northwest Ordinance was passed on July 13, 1787. It addressed the issue of how the western lands would be governed. According to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, all the lands in the West would be placed under territorial governments. A governor and legislature would govern each territory. The Ordinance also made provision for these territories to become states. According to the Ordinance, as soon as a territory's population reached 60,000, it could present its state constitution and apply for admission to the Union as a state. Ohio was the first of these territories to become a state. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 also provided land for schools and colleges.

How did these land policies affect the American Indians?

The Northwest Ordinance included language that recognized the land rights of American Indians. It said that Indian land would not be taken without their agreement. However, eventually, the Indians' land was taken and whites settled the territory. ❖

YOUR TURN!

1. Why did the Continental Congress develop land policies?

2. How did these land policies affect white settlers?

3. How did these land policies ultimately affect American Indians?
