

Finding Your Off Grid Land: What to Know Before You Buy

Starting the Search for Off Grid Land

I remember the first time I seriously looked at off grid land. It was a patch of rocky hillside in Colorado, and I drove out there on a whim after seeing a listing online. The road turned to gravel, then to dirt, then to two tire tracks through sagebrush. By the time I got to the property, I was already thinking about water and power. That trip taught me a lot about what you actually need to check before you hand over any money.

Off grid land is not just remote property. It is a place where you take on responsibilities that a subdivision would normally handle for you. There is no city water hookup, no sewer line, no power pole waiting at the lot line. That freedom is exactly what draws people to it, but it also means you have to be your own utility company, road crew, and sometimes your own fire department.



Water First, Everything Else Second

The most important thing on any rural property is water. Without a reliable source, you are not living there long term. Well water is the standard for [off grid land](#), but drilling a well is expensive and not guaranteed to produce. I have seen people buy a beautiful piece of land only to find out the nearest water is 600 feet down and the drilling estimate is more than they paid for the property.

Before you commit, check if there is an existing well or if neighbors have wells and at what depth. Some areas have groundwater that is easy to reach; others are a gamble. You can also look at options like rainwater catchment or hauling water, but those work better for weekend use than full-time living. If you plan to live there year round, well water is usually the only practical choice.

Waste and Power Are Not Afterthoughts

Once you have water sorted, the next big items are waste and electricity. A composting toilet is a common solution for off grid land because it does not need water or a septic system. It works well if you follow the maintenance routine, and it avoids the cost and regulation of a traditional septic system. But if you want a flush toilet, you will need a septic system, which requires a perc test and a building permit.



For power, off-grid solar is the go-to for most people. A good solar panel setup with a battery bank can run lights, a refrigerator, and a water pump. I have seen setups that also include a propane tank for cooking and heating, which takes some load off the solar system during cloudy weeks. The key is to size your system honestly. Do not skimp on battery capacity or assume you will only use power during sunny months.

Access and Legal Boundaries

Another lesson I learned early is that not all off grid land has legal access. You might see a parcel on a map that looks like it borders a road, but that road could be a private easement owned by a neighbor. If there is no recorded easement giving you the right to cross that land, you could end up landlocked. Always get a land survey and review the easement documents before you buy.

Title issues are rare but worth checking. A quiet title action might be needed if the property has unclear ownership history. Most sellers of rural property handle this before listing, but it is worth asking about. The last thing you want is a legal dispute over a piece of land you thought was yours.

Building Permits and Local Rules

Even on off grid land, you cannot just build whatever you want. Every county has its own rules about building permits, minimum square footage, and what counts as a dwelling. Some counties are very relaxed about tiny houses and cabin kits, while others require a full foundation and approved septic system before you can get a certificate of occupancy. I have seen people build a nice cabin only to have to tear it down because they skipped the permit process.



Check with the county planning office before you buy. Ask about setbacks, building permit requirements, and whether they allow composting toilets or require a septic system. Also ask about fire restrictions. In many western states, you are required to maintain a fire break around any structure on off grid land, especially if it borders BLM land or National Forest.

Financing and Ownership Terms

Financing is one of the biggest hurdles for off grid land. Traditional banks usually do not lend on raw land, especially if there is no house on it. That is where owner financing comes in. Many sellers of rural property offer their own financing with low down payments and no credit check. This can make it possible to buy land that you might not qualify for through a bank. But read the terms carefully. Some owner financing deals have balloon payments or high interest rates, so make sure you understand what you are signing.

Living Without an HOA

One of the best parts of owning off grid land is that it is usually HOA-free. No one tells you what color to paint your cabin or how tall your grass can be. But that freedom also means you are responsible for everything. Roads, trash, fire safety, and keeping the place from becoming an eyesore are all on you. I have met people who love that independence and others who wish they had a little more support from neighbors. It comes down to personality.

Recreational Land as a Starting Point

Not everyone who buys off grid land intends to live there full time right away. Many people start with recreational land, maybe a parcel near National Forest where they can camp, hunt, or just get away from town. They park an RV on it, set up a few solar panels, and use a propane tank for cooking. Over time, they might add a tiny house or a cabin kit, then eventually build a permanent home. This phased approach spreads out the cost and gives you time to learn the land before committing to a big build.



Final Thoughts on Choosing Your Land

Every piece of off grid land has its own quirks. One might have great views but no water. Another might have a well but terrible road access. The trick is to know your priorities and be willing to walk away from a property that does not meet them. Do your homework on water, access, permits, and financing. Talk to neighbors if you can. Drive the road in wet weather to see if it turns into mud. And always get a land survey before closing.

Buying off grid land is not a simple transaction. It is a commitment to a different way of living, one that rewards patience and self-reliance. If you go in with open eyes and a realistic plan, it can be one of the best decisions you ever make.