

Practical Off-Grid Land Buying Guide

I bought land, made mistakes, and learned many things the hard way. There are many flaws with my land and looking back, I honestly probably would've held out for a different parcel. But that ship has sailed, and here I am at peace with my decision and my land.

I am writing this guide because these are the things that matter when buying rural property with the intention of homesteading.

I am hoping you can learn from me and find a piece of land that feels like your forever home.

Now, living off the grid will amplify who you already are. If you're peaceful, it will feel peaceful. If you're restless, it will feel isolating. If you're financially stressed, it will feel heavier. Land does not fix internal problems — it magnifies them.

This is why it's important to identify your "why" before going off the grid.

Part One: KNOW YOUR WHY

Before you commit to buying a piece of land that you may live on forever, I suggest really knowing *why* you want this in the first place.

It could be something as small as having less neighbors. Or it could be as big as wanting to start a farming operation. Figuring out what is motivating you to live off-grid will help you hone in on where and how much land you want to get.

Here are some "WHY" ideas to consider:

Lifestyle WHYs:

- To escape from people and noise for a more peaceful life
- More space between neighbors
- Enjoy a milder climate
- Find peace and beauty in nature
- Have a small cozy town nearby but not live in it
- Become a full-time prepper and survivalist
- Enjoy the fruits of your labor

Operational WHYs:

- Start a homestead-based business
- Run a livestock or farming operation
- Work remotely from the land
- Test survival and homesteading skills
- Leave the grid entirely to disconnect

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Before you move forward, I want you to read these questions and answer these honestly:

- How much money do I need monthly to feel stable?
- Do I have any debt racked up that makes me uncomfortable?
- Am I willing to haul water indefinitely?
- Can I deal with a 30–60 minute drive to town regularly?
- Am I ok with living far from a hospital? Gas station?
- Do I want or need community?
- Am I prepared to handle an emergency without help?

Answering these will help you decide how near or far you feel comfortable being from things like gas stations, grocery stores, hospitals, and emergency services.

PRO TIP: Call the local emergency services and get an estimate for how quickly first responders can get to you.

Part Two: Location, Location, Location

Contrary to what people think they want, I do not suggest buying land where there are large upscale ranches in beautiful scenic and pastoral settings, unless you can afford to keep a lovely facade.

The reason I say this is because neighbors will call the county on you if you violate any covenants on the land. Boats, RVs, cars, trucks, piles of wood, trash, burn piles, noise, shooting guns, all get complicated in communities like these.

Higher-end rural communities often have stricter enforcement of covenants, more active HOAs, and neighbors who are invested in maintaining property aesthetics and resale value.

I live in more of a rundown area with lower to middle class folks just trying to make a living. We all shoot our guns and no one really cares what is going on. No one is spying on me, waiting for me to slip up; there are no covenants or HOAs here.

I basically have total freedom to do what I want, when I want. The county really could care less that I even exist, let alone what I am doing.

Now if your scene is to live a more polished rural life, then by all means go for it! But if you want to experiment and have some more freedoms on your land, then you will trade some of that prestige for grit.

Of course, the downfall is that you can end up with some cruddy neighbors. But that is why I have 30 acres instead of five.

I have plenty of buffer between neighbors that I don't really care what they do on their land.

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Here are some things to watch out for when choosing your location:

Access & Infrastructure:

- Road quality and who maintains it
- Distance to goods and services
- Emergency response distance

Legal & Regulatory:

- Zoning
- Restrictions, HOAs, covenants
- No roadblocks to build, camp, shoot, run livestock

Land Characteristics:

- Water access
- Soil composition
- Flood risk
- Fire risk
- Wind exposure
- Flora and tree cover

Lifestyle Fit:

- Distance from neighbors
- Community culture
- Hunting access
- Gardening feasibility
- Livestock feasibility

Part Three: WATER IS LIFE

Water is the single most important variable when buying rural land.

There are so many places that could be amazing to homestead on - except there is no water.

You can drill a well in many places, but in some locations the water is deep and sour. You will have to spend a fortune on the drilling, and the equipment. You will have to power the well. You will have to treat the water. Wells can feel secure but wells can also dry up.

I suggest having at least one backup plan for your water system, just in case something happens.

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My backup is that I can always haul water from the local water depot, which is only ten miles away. I also plan to collect rainwater; there are no restrictions on my land to do that.

Hauling water is a decent option and lots of people do this permanently. You can find your local water depot by calling the fire department. You can get a trailer and water tank and haul the water yourself. Or you can pay someone to haul water to you. Water hauling is usually a relatively affordable option.

Then there is rain catchment. This is a great idea in the desert, because we get seasonal monsoons. We will have downpours of rain in the summer which can add up to thousands of gallons of fresh water, mostly free from contamination (unlike groundwater).

Unfortunately, I have heard horror stories about the legality of rain catchment. I know a guy in northwest Arizona that was told he must remove his rainwater system or be fined \$50,000 from the HOA that his property belongs to.

Their argument was that he was stealing the water that fed the aquifer. Now I call bs on that claim because 95% of all rainfall washes away and evaporates in the desert. But he was forced to take down his system.

This is another important reason to not build where there are covenants and HOAs.

I have a well on my property that I acquired when I purchased my second parcel. If I were to hire someone to drill, it would cost \$10k-\$25k between the drilling and equipment. It is not cheap, and my water table is only 100 feet.

The deeper you go, the more expensive it gets.

Factors of a well system:

- Drilling cost (depth dependent)
- Pump system
- Pressure tank
- Power source (grid or solar)
- Water flow
- Recharge rate
- Calcium and hard minerals
- Algae and living organisms
- Water table fluctuations

I suggest talking to your prospective neighbors about their water situation and get some feedback on what they do for water. That is what I did before I bought my land.

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Part Five: THE COST

At some point, you will have to move from analysis to action. The key is making a decision from being prepared as much as you possibly can be.

Now, I thought I did this. I thought I was prepared and ready to plunge into off-grid life, but boy was I wrong!

You will never be fully prepared because every situation is 100% unique and there are always unexpected challenges and unforeseen events that you could never predict.

I do not want to discourage you from taking the leap. I think you need to find a good balance of research, doing your due diligence in your area, having enough money saved, and being prepared for things to fail. Then at some point, you have to just go for it!

Land is going to likely be your highest expense. There has been such a price increase on land, with acres pricing from a few thousand dollars to well over five figures per acre, and all the way to the moon in some locations, like Montana.

I suggest not getting a parcel smaller than 10 acres. That is becoming harder to come by, so you may have to buy adjacent parcels. Many land listings are owned by the same owner, and will give you a deal on buying more than one lot.

Anything smaller than ten acres will feel cramped, unless you're abutted to public lands.

I really stress looking for a seller finance situation because banks will charge between 40-70% down and also charge a higher interest rate. Sellers are becoming more flexible and comfortable with personally financing their property.

If you go with seller financing, make sure the deal is handled by a title company which is your escrow and protection. That way you don't get ripped off. And make sure there are no backtaxes on the land.

Going off-grid is cost intensive at first. You will have a down payment on the land (or buy it outright), then you will need water, power, septic, and roads. Earthworks is a pretty big deal so be prepared to purchase a tractor or contract an owner operator.

Here are some more expenses that will add up quick:

Initial Acquisition Costs:

- Land price
- Closing costs
- Taxes

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Essential Infrastructure:

- Water system
- Septic
- Power (solar or grid)
- Road access / driveway

Secondary Infrastructure:

- Outbuildings
- Fencing
- Garden infrastructure
- Equipment (tractor, tools)
- Trash storage

It is pretty normal that your figure is going to push past \$100k pretty quickly, unless you are thrifty, do the building yourself, find cheap and free building materials, and possibly have pre-existing infrastructures on the land.

My advice is to not sweat it too much. You are capable of living in cheap and meager situations and still have quality of life. A cheap RV or a tiny shed conversion (like I did) is totally doable.

That way you can spread the expenses across a longer period of time so you don't have to go into debt to rush your system building.

Part 6: MISTAKES YOU CAN AVOID

I made many mistakes and so will you. It is the natural learning process and it's healthy to make mistakes and learn from your failures. However, there are some missteps that should be heeded with caution that I wish I followed my gut on.

1. Going in with an ill fitted partner. I have seen this happen often, not just to me, but with other couples where the off-grid life simply broke down the relationship. Oftentimes, this stems from one partner either secretly not wanting to live the lifestyle but going forward with the decision without voicing their concerns, or some type of substance abuse problem.

2. Having unmanageable and unresolved debt is a big problem that will only become exacerbated when you go off grid. It is important to whittle your debt down to almost zero so you can afford the systems and breakdowns when they happen, because they will happen, no matter how much you plan.

3. Not being in the area long enough to know what you are getting into. I recommend being in an area for at least a year so you can understand weather patterns, climate, and community.

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4. Going way too remote. There are amazingly beautiful properties that are cheap but are located in extremely rural locations. I would be concerned if I had to travel more than thirty miles for gas, and even that is pushing it.

5. Not believing in yourself. It takes confidence and determination to pull this lifestyle off. You have to remain hopeful that things will be alright! Even when you are faced with the toughest circumstances, you must remain hopeful or else the sense of fear and dread will take over. Always believe in yourself, you can conquer any challenge. Take me for an example!

Part 7: MY GOLDEN RULES

These are the values I live by and have been proven time and time again in my experience:

1. I do not buy what I cannot afford. Period.

I have thought so many times that I want to buy a tractor. I have managed to get by this far without one, and if I really want one, I will save up for it.

New tractors are outrageously overpriced, and a lot of them simply are not powerful enough to do the real work needed on the land. Old ones are better and cheaper but require a lot of maintenance and can break down often.

2. Always have AT LEAST \$5k in the bank for breakdowns and repairs.

I think that number is a bit lean but you should be able to have most things fixed under \$5k like a truck repair, well pump replacement, solar equipment failure, or septic blowout.

3. Everything will cost 50% more and take twice as long. I still have to be proven wrong that this isn't true. Always over pad the budget and plan for building to take longer, it just is the way it is.

4. Going into debt over anything on the land is an absolute final resort that is only warranted for an extreme emergency. If you must get into debt to continue living on your land, try and get a 0% interest credit card to bail you out. But only if your situation is dire.

5. Do not kill yourself to get all your systems up and running and perfect. There are times where you will be uncomfortable and things will be half finished. This is a journey and a process, not a race to the end. The lifestyle never ends.

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Part 8: HOMEWORK

Here is a checklist for you to refer to so you can perform your due diligence before buying land.

- ☐ Live in the area for one year and observe everything.
- ☐ Talk to at least 2 neighbors right in the area you are looking to buy.
- ☐ Call the local emergency services and know how long it will take to get to you.
- ☐ Make sure to have a backup water system in your plans.
- ☐ Look at the history of the parcel in the County Recorder's system.
- ☐ Check on zoning and regulations.
- ☐ Make sure the land is not in a covenant or HOA.
- ☐ Figure out the tax burden by looking at the parcel tax history.
- ☐ Make sure you have a good easement to access the land.
- ☐ Check who maintains the road and if they are in decent condition.
- ☐ Consider noxious weeds and invasive species are not out of control.
- ☐ Mind the temperatures and growing seasons.
- ☐ Check all adjoining parcels to see what their status is.
- ☐ If you are getting a well, get quotes from contractors.
- ☐ If you are using solar, check for a good position for the panels.
- ☐ Seek the rules of installing a septic or an outhouse.

Part 9: CONCLUSION

Going off the grid isn't about escaping responsibility or running away from society. In many ways, it requires more responsibility than a conventional lifestyle.

You'll become your own utility company, your own maintenance crew, your own problem solver, and sometimes your own first responder.

But with that responsibility comes something that is becoming increasingly rare: freedom.

Freedom to design, create, build, dream, and invest into your own life and future.

Will it always be easy? Absolutely not. I suggest not rushing the journey and enjoying yourself while creating your own reality.

I hope this guide helps you avoid some of the mistakes I made and gives you the confidence to take the next step toward your own version of freedom.

Thank you for reading.

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