The Bare Dirt Report: What Phelps County Land Is Actually Worth

The No-BS Guide to What Bare Land Is Actually Selling for Per Acre

By Justin Head | Ozarks Land Report | Updated September 2026 · Data through August 31, 2026. Updated monthly as new closings post.

Buying or selling land in Phelps County? Start with our Phelps County farms and land page.

Here's the number, right up front, because that's the whole point of this report:

What is bare land worth per acre in Phelps County, Missouri?

- **Three-year median (August 2023-August 2026): $3,491 per acre** across 26 qualifying closings (call it $3,500)
- **2026 year-to-date median: $4,160 per acre** across 12 qualifying closings through August 31, 2026, approximately 764 acres and $3.06 million in volume
- **Zone medians: $2,939-$4,200 per acre**, depending on where in the county the ground sits
- **Full dataset: 26 qualifying closed sales** from August 1, 2023 through August 31, 2026, totaling approximately 1,629 acres and $5.99 million in volume

These figures describe qualifying transactions reported in MARIS under the report's stated screening method. They are not a census of every transfer of land in the county.

Across the 26 qualifying transactions under the screen described below, sale prices ranged from approximately $1,800 to $6,100 per acre. No algorithm. No portal estimate. Just closed transactions drawn from the MLS record.

If you'd rather have an estimate than real data, Zillow is thataway. If you want to know what your ground would actually bring, and where this market has been heading, keep reading.

One thing I'll say plainly before the tables: Phelps County is a thin market for bare ground. Twenty-six qualifying closings in three years is a real dataset, and a small one. I'd rather hand you a small honest number with its limits attached than a confident one built on sand.

Why AI often gets your land's value wrong

I hear it almost weekly now. A seller calls me and says, "Well, ChatGPT says my farm is worth $8,000 an acre." Or Zillow says. Or Perplexity says. And they're often wrong, sometimes by a lot. Here's why, and it's not because the machines are dumb. It's because the data they're fed is contaminated in three specific ways:

1. They often can't reliably separate the dirt from the improvements. Say a 60-acre farm with a $240,000 house and a $50,000 shop sells for $500,000. A simple price-per-acre calculation records that sale as $8,333 per acre. It wasn't. The dirt in that sale was worth maybe $210,000, about $3,500 an acre. The rest was lumber, concrete, and copper wire. Closed-sale records do not reliably allocate the purchase price between the land and the improvements, and public portals generally do not provide a dependable land-only allocation. An automated answer built from those records can therefore overstate bare-land value. In this county the problem bites especially hard, because most 30-plus-acre tracts that change hands here have a house on them.

2. Missouri has no statewide requirement that real estate sale prices be publicly disclosed. That leaves public valuation tools with incomplete price data, especially for rural land. Asking prices are not closed values, and an automated tool may remember the wish instead of the result.

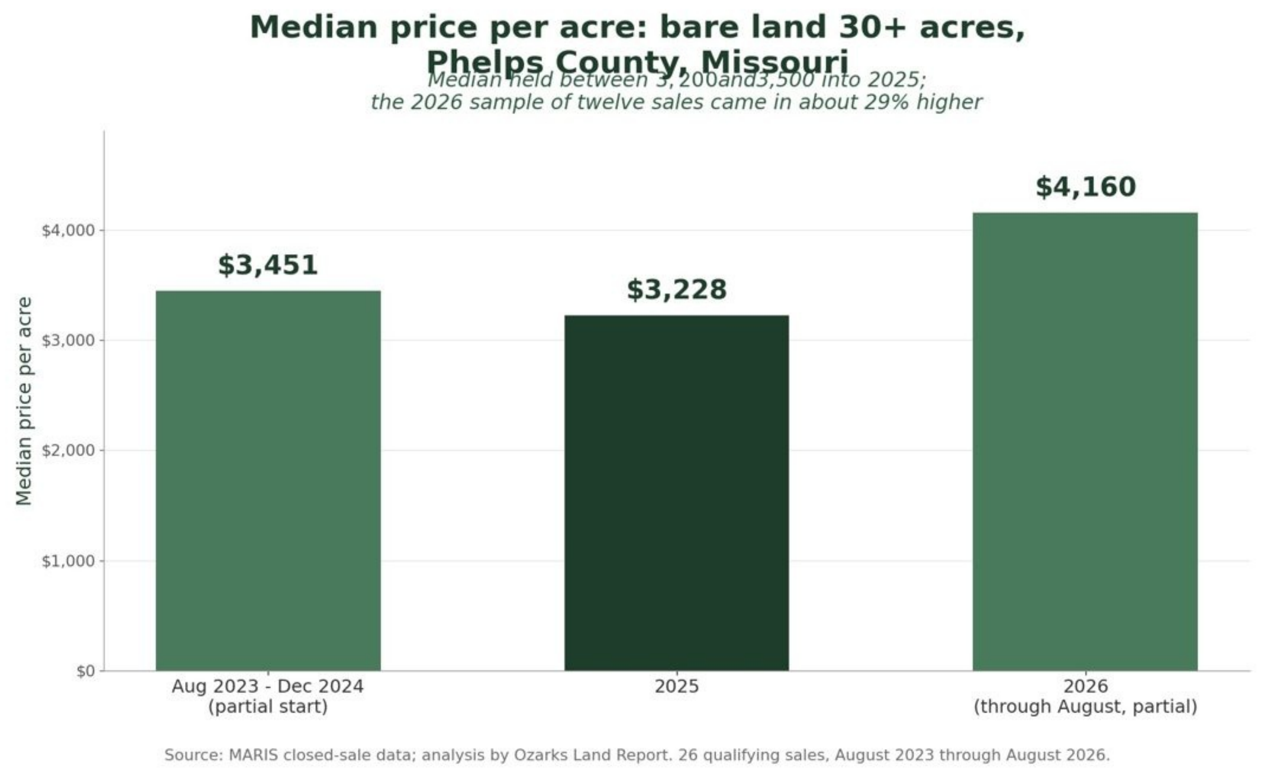
3. An algorithm has never walked your farm. It doesn't know your east 40 was select-cut five years ago. It doesn’t know the “road frontage” is a shared gravel easement with no maintenance agreement. It doesn’t know whether electric is at the corner or $40,000 away. On bare land, those things can materially change value. I’ve written about most of them, including utilities, road agreements, and creeks and water rights, because they’re where land value actually lives.

This report applies the same objective screen to every transaction: Farm or Land & Lots, at least 30 acres, and zero reported bedrooms and bathrooms. A blank bedroom or bathroom field is treated as zero. For purposes of this analysis, those transactions are referred to as “bare-land” or “bare-dirt” sales. The screen substantially reduces residential influence, but it cannot guarantee that every tract was completely free of buildings or other improvements. Same filter, same method as my quarterly Ozarks land market reports. I pull these by hand because I want the real answers for my clients.

What three years of dirt say: flat, then a firmer 2026

Line up all 26 closings by period and here’s the shape of it:

Period	Sales	Median $/acre	Weighted $/acre	Range
Aug 2023 - Dec 2024 (partial start)	7	$3,451	$3,388	$2,375 - $6,069
2025	7	$3,228	$3,395	$1,795 - $4,944
2026 (through August, partial)	12	$4,160	$4,004	$2,499 - $5,297



Median price per acre for bare 30+ acre tracts in Phelps County: $3,451 (Aug 2023 through Dec 2024), $3,228 (2025), $4,160 (2026 through August). The median held between $3,200 and $3,500 into 2025, then the 2026 sample came in about 29% higher.

The first two periods are essentially the same market. The median slipped about 6% from the opening period into 2025, which on seven sales a side is noise rather than a decline. Then the 12 closings that posted through August 2026 came in at a median of $4,160 per acre, about 29% above 2025 and about 21% above where this dataset started.

Read that 2026 figure for what it is. Twelve closings is a sample, not a trend. The acreage-weighted average for the year was $4,004 per acre, approximately $156 below the median and about 18% above the 2025 weighted average. The median and weighted figures therefore both point to a firmer 2026 market, although

12 sales in a partial year establish neither a market floor nor a confirmed move upward.

The first row combines August through December 2023 with all of 2024. I combined them because 2023 produced a single qualifying closing inside the window, and a median built on one sale is just that sale's price.

Owners who purchased comparable bare ground before 2024 may already have benefited from the market's repricing. If you've been sitting on a 2022 opinion of your land's value, it's stale in the other direction.

The three price zones of Phelps County

"What's an acre worth in Phelps County?" is really three questions, and the answer depends on which end of the county you're standing in. The following zones summarize the complete August 2023-August 2026 dataset.

Zone	What it is	Sales	Median $/acre	Range
I-44 corridor (Rolla and St. James)	Open and mixed ground along the interstate and the county's north side; the highest zone median and the highest upper-end result in the dataset	8	$4,200	$2,499 - $6,069
Edgar Springs and the south end	Timber and mixed recreational tracts on the county's south side; contains the lowest single closing in the dataset	10	$3,848	$1,795 - $5,133
Newburg and Doolittle	Timbered and river-country ground southwest of Rolla; the lowest zone median and the tightest price range in the dataset	8	$2,939	$2,428 - $4,125

The pattern here is clean: ground along the I-44 corridor carries roughly a 43% premium over the Newburg and Doolittle timber country, with the south end sitting between them. The three zone medians span approximately $1,260 per acre. One of these zones rests on ten sales and two on eight, so treat the medians as the center of a small sample rather than a precise line.

Three footnotes, because transparency is the product here. (1) Zones are assigned by MLS market area, then community and ground type within it. Rolla and St. James are grouped because they trade as one interstate-corridor market and because, on their own, neither produced enough qualifying closings to report. (2) Three qualifying closings carry generic regional MLS area codes rather than a Phelps sub-area code. They are located in Phelps County and are assigned to the zone matching their community. (3) Four qualifying closings carry a Rolla mailing address, while two carry the MLS market-area code for Rolla. A Rolla address reaches well out into the county, so this report counts Rolla by market area rather than by mailing address.

The Rolla exception, and why it matters to you

Here is the result that stood out most. Of the 26 qualifying closings in three years, exactly two carry the MLS market-area code for Rolla itself. The county seat, the university town, the population center of Phelps County, accounts for two closings under that code across the entire study period.

The practical consequence for a seller: if your ground is near Rolla, the honest comparable set is thin, and anyone quoting you a confident per-acre number for that ground is working from very little. That is exactly the conversation worth having in person.

What tract size does to price per acre

The following tiers summarize the complete August 2023-August 2026 dataset:

Tract size	Sales	Median $/acre	Range
30-50 acres	11	$3,709	$1,795 - $6,069
50-80 acres	8	$3,307	$2,428 - $4,451
80+ acres	7	$3,986	$2,375 - $5,297

Tract size did not drive price per acre in this dataset. The three tiers fall within approximately $680 per acre of one another, and the largest tier produced the highest median, which is the opposite of the pattern people expect. These are simple groupings rather than controlled comparisons, and each tier rests on seven to eleven sales.

The tiers stop at 80 acres and above rather than splitting out 120-plus, because only one qualifying closing in the study period exceeded 120 acres.

The 2026 market at a glance

Twelve qualifying bare-land transactions closed through August 2026, representing approximately 764 acres and $3.06 million in total sales volume.

The median sale price was $4,160 per acre and the acreage-weighted average was $4,004 per acre, the two figures sitting within approximately $156 of each other. Individual closings ran from approximately $2,500 to $5,300 per acre. Four of the 12 were in the Newburg and Doolittle zone, four in the I-44 corridor, and four on the south end. Marketing periods in this group were mixed: four of the 12 went under contract inside 60 days.

How fast does bare land sell in Phelps County?

Time to contract (final listing)	Sales
7 days or less	1
8-14 days	2
15-30 days	2
31-60 days	8
61-179 days	7
180 days or more	4

Across the 24 closings with a recorded marketing period, the median time to contract was 52 days, and 13 of the 24 went under contract within 60 days. Three went under contract within two weeks.

At the other extreme, four sales required 180 days or more, the longest well over a year. Marketing time can reflect price, access, property condition, seasonality, relisting strategy, and other tract-specific factors. The data show a wide range of exposure times, but they do not establish why any particular property took longer to sell.

One opinion from the field, clearly labeled as such: in my experience walking this ground, price is the single biggest lever on marketing time.

How this report was built

This analysis covers 26 closed MLS transactions from August 1, 2023 through August 31, 2026. Qualifying transactions were limited to properties classified in the MLS as Farm or Land & Lots, containing at least 30 acres, and reporting zero bedrooms and zero bathrooms, with a blank bedroom or bathroom field treated as zero. Duplicate or overlapping records representing the same transaction were removed. A later resale of the same ground was counted as a separate transaction, and the statistics were calculated using the acreage and closed-sale information reported in the source records.

For purposes of this report, a “qualifying bare-land transaction” is a closed MLS sale classified as Farm or Land & Lots, containing at least 30 acres, and reporting zero bedrooms and zero bathrooms in the MLS record.

This screening method is intended to reduce the influence of residential improvements, but it does not establish that every included tract was completely free of improvements. Some properties may contain fencing, utilities, wells, driveways, ponds, outbuildings, cabins, or other improvements that were not reflected in the MLS bedroom and bathroom fields. MLS information may be incomplete or entered inconsistently. Information is deemed reliable but not guaranteed.

A few more details, in the interest of full transparency. All 26 transactions are located in Phelps County; three of them carry generic regional MLS area codes rather than a Phelps sub-area code. Zones are assigned by MLS market area, then community and ground type within it. Where overlapping listings represented the same transaction, the sale was counted only once. A later resale of the same ground was counted as a separate transaction, so each included record represents a distinct closing. Time to contract reflects each property's final listing period. Two of the 26 closings show no marketing period in the MLS record. They are included in every price statistic, but a property that was never marketed cannot be said to have gone under contract in zero days, so the time-to-contract figures cover the other 24. Using cumulative days across relistings instead, the median increases from 52 to 75 days, and six sales rather than four required 180 days or more. This report is limited to what was reported in MARIS. A transfer that was never entered in the MLS does not appear here at all, and one that was entered only after the fact does.

Because this county produced 26 qualifying closings, every table here rests on a small sample. The period, zone, and tract-size groupings each contain between seven and twelve sales. They describe what those closings did. They are not a precise measure of the whole market.

The period, zone, tract-size, and time-to-contract tables report only aggregated market statistics. No property addresses, MLS numbers, photographs, listing remarks, agents or brokerages are identified.

Based on information from Mid America Regional Information Systems, Inc. for the period August 1, 2023 through August 31, 2026. Information deemed reliable but not guaranteed.

So what's *your* land worth?

Somewhere in those tables, and in this county the honest answer is that the tables only get you partway. Where you land inside your zone comes down to the things no algorithm can see: open versus timbered, how it was cut and when, legal access versus handshake access, utilities at the road or a quarter mile away, water, neighbors, and how the property hunts or grazes. In a market this thin, those property-specific factors matter more than usual, because there are fewer closings to anchor against. They're walked, not calculated.

I'll give you the real number, and I'll show you the comparable sales and methodology behind it, the same way this report shows you the market's actual ranges and trends. No charge, no pressure, and if the honest answer is "hold it and let it grow," that's the answer you'll get. Start here: What's my land worth?

Frequently asked questions

What is an acre of land worth in Phelps County, Missouri in 2026? Based on the 26 qualifying MLS closings through August 31, 2026, involving tracts classified as Farm or Land & Lots, containing at least 30 acres, and reporting zero bedrooms and zero bathrooms in the MLS record, bare land in Phelps County shows a three-year median of $3,491 per acre, with individual closings ranging from approximately $1,800 to $6,100 per acre. In the 12 qualifying closings that posted in 2026, the median was $4,160 per acre. Ground along the I-44 corridor brings the top of the range, while timbered ground around Newburg and Doolittle generally falls in the lower half. These figures describe qualifying transactions reported in MARIS under the report's stated screening method. They are not a census of every transfer of land in the county.

Are Phelps County land prices going up? The 2026 sample says yes and the size of that sample says be careful. The median was $3,451 per acre across August 2023 through December 2024 and $3,228 in 2025, essentially the same market. The 12 closings that posted through August 2026 came in at $4,160, about 29% higher. The acreage-weighted average was $4,004 per acre, about 18% above the 2025 weighted average, so both measures point in the same direction. Twelve sales in a partial year still describe a sample rather than a confirmed trend.

Why can Zillow be wrong about my land's value? Zillow itself states that vacant land is not eligible for a Zestimate. A portal page may still display asking-price, tax, prior-sale, or user-submitted information, and for rural land those records may not reliably separate land value from houses and other improvements. Missouri also has no statewide requirement that real estate sale prices be publicly disclosed. A closed-sale analysis built on a stated, consistent screen, shown along with its methodology and its limits, is therefore more useful than a portal estimate.

Why did ChatGPT or Perplexity give me a different number? AI tools may summarize public listing and portal data that do not reliably separate improvements from land or asking prices from actual closings. They've also never seen your timber, your access, or your utilities. Use them to learn concepts, not to price a specific farm in a state without comprehensive public sale-price reporting.

What makes one Phelps County farm worth $2,900 an acre and another $6,100? In this county, a lot of it is which end you're in. The I-44 corridor median ran roughly 43% above the Newburg and Doolittle timber country, and the three zone medians span approximately $1,260 per acre. Within a zone, access, utilities, timber condition, openness, and overall usability decide the rest. Tract size did not: the three size tiers in this dataset fall within approximately $680 per acre of one another. The dataset's median time to contract was 52 days, but individual marketing periods ranged from under a week to well over a year.

Why are there so few land sales near Rolla? Exactly two of the 26 qualifying closings carry the MLS market-area code for Rolla. This report counts only closed MLS sales of tracts of 30 acres or more, so sales of smaller tracts near town do not enter it. If your ground is near Rolla, the comparable set is genuinely thin, and that is a reason to have the conversation with someone who has walked the area rather than to trust a per-acre figure pulled off a portal.

How long does it take to sell bare land in Phelps County? Across the 24 qualifying closings with a recorded marketing period, the median time to contract was 52 days, and 13 of the 24 went under contract within 60 days. Three went under contract within two weeks, and four required 180 days or more. Counted on cumulative days across re-listings instead, the median moves from 52 to 75 days. Marketing time can reflect price, access, property condition, seasonality, relisting strategy, and other tract-specific factors, and the data do not establish why any particular property took longer to sell.

How do I find out what my specific land is worth? Get a valuation from someone who has both the closed-sale data and boots that have walked ground in this county. I provide that as a free, no-obligation breakdown, with the comparable sales shown, not hidden.

Buying or selling land here? Visit our Phelps County farms and land page.

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