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Federal Lands Interim Committee Hearing

Following World War II wood was badly needed for housing as soldiers returned to marry and have families. A significant portion of this need was met by logging national forests in the western US, including Idaho. A thriving lumber industry resulted as these vast forest lands were logged. Counties benefitted from the 25% of sale receipts that they received, spending it on schools and infrastructure, jobs were created and sustained, and rural communities thrived. Vast elk herds browsed the brush field resulting from the 1910 and ensuing fires, and people came to hunt these animals. The Organic Administration Act of 1897 and Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 provided the guiding principles for management of federal forests, **with an emphasis on sustaining local economies.**

Management of our federal forests began to change in the late 1950's and early 60's as more and more pressure was placed on the agencies to meet timber production targets with less funding and on increasingly rougher and more remote ground. As a result the Forest Service and BLM began to cut corners, relying more and more on clearcutting, a cheap and easy harvest system, something to which many of the people for whom they were managing the public's forests objected. Environmental organizations formed or strengthened locally and nationally, eventually gaining enormous political leverage. The result was passage of a series of well meaning but often badly written laws in the 60's and 70's, such as the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, *and* the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, ~~and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976.~~

These laws and the case law resulting from them have brought proactive management of the Federal public lands to a virtual standstill. The can-do, feet on the ground forest managers have been replaced by frustrated interdisciplinary planners who face the hopeless task of producing plans that comply with every nuance of impossibly complex laws, rules and regulations. Much of this resulted from litigation by various organizations who want to eliminate or severely reduce those things of which they do not approve. Over the years, the laws intended to improve the management of federal lands have instead created management gridlock.

With the disastrous decline in the sale of national forest timber and its devastating effects on the economies of rural communities, we were told that recreation would take up the slack. Indeed, many communities turned to various forms of recreation to fill in behind the job losses. However, we were not told that only certain types of recreation would be acceptable. Motorized recreation, the most popular and growing group of recreational activities, was not on the approved list. Of course motorized recreation was one of the biggest wealth and job creators for much of Idaho. Our studies have shown that motorized recreationists, such as snowmobilers, spend lots of money in Idaho on such things as lodging, food, fuel, machine rental or purchase, repairs and more.

In Hells Canyon, for example, the vast majority of visitors access the river with jetboats and the river has a history of motorized access on this navigable river dating back to 1865. However, when a river recreation management plan was finally produced jetboaters were excluded from the heart of the canyon for 21 days of the summer prime use season to provide a near wilderness experience to floaters who did not want to share the river with the motorized craft and their passengers. This decision was not driven by resource concerns; floaters with their overnight camping were actually more impactful on the land than jetboaters. We were told that jetboaters were excluded because they did not mind seeing floaters, but some floaters did not like jetboats.

There are many more examples of where similar things have happened or are proposed to happen throughout Idaho involving all forms of motorized recreation such as the proposed ^{new} ~~Boulder White Clouds Wilderness~~ ^{beels}, the Forest Service's Region I ^{areas} policy excluding all motorized recreation from recommended wildernesses, and the on-going threat to snowmobiling in the south half of Mt. Jefferson to benefit a backcountry ski operation even though sledders have been riding there since the 70's and voluntarily agreed to give up half of the mountain and of course one cannot forget the recent loss of the Great Burn to snowmobiling—truly one of the great injustices in Travel Planning ever—and yes I am bitter. There are species listed under ESA or proposed for listing, such as the caribou, Canadian lynx, wolverine and grizzly bear that will be used as a reason to close vast more acreage to motorized access.

We, with the Idaho State Snowmobile Association, work closely with the federal agency people and find many of them dedicated, competent and hard-working. They are, however, in an impossible situation, constantly threatened with lawsuits or political pressure. With each new land management plan, recreation access, especially motorized, is relegated to smaller and smaller areas. Compromise is always a matter of how much we will lose. Gates go up on our favorite areas to

ride, and we are excluded. The justification for our exclusion is often 'conflict', that means someone does not like us or if we continue to use the area it will be more difficult to designate it Wilderness, rarely is resource damage an issue. This has the same effect that a constricting reptile has on its prey. With every breath the prey takes, in our case every planning cycle, the coils tighten until there is no more room for breath to be taken.

If Idaho could manage these lands under Idaho law, we have little doubt but the lands would be more productive and accessible. The land and its resources would benefit as well as the economies of our communities and the nation as a whole. However, if the land comes encumbered by the same laws, rules and regulations federal managers face, the financial burden would be insurmountable and the likelihood of better management small.

If management is to fall under state law the severance from federal to state ownership must be complete. This, however, will not stop the state from becoming the new target for paralyzing litigation under those laws that would still apply, such as ESA. From the recreationist's point of view access is a key issue. If we do not have access, we do not need a sled! We would like to see these lands available for a variety of recreation pursuits in well managed settings. This does not mean every acre open for every pursuit or that the amount of use can always be unlimited. The quality of the various experiences is important and the challenge is to find a satisfactory balance between quality and quantity. The land or waters used for various recreation pursuits must be suitable for the activities allowed and use levels managed within limits that the land or water can sustain. Infrastructure is also an important consideration, including roads, trails, trailheads, campgrounds, and more. Quality, safe and well maintained facilities attract use and concentrate impacts into manageable locations. Management must consider the forest lands and their uses as a whole. Wildlife, fish, water, soils, vegetation, air, cultural and recreation resources must all be treated in an integrated manner. And finally, managers should look for ways to maximize recreation opportunity without sacrificing quality or sustainability. How refreshing to have our public lands managed in a way that included more uses than the current system where uses are continually excluded.

We believe there is great merit in Congressman Labrador's bill "Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Lands Act" that would transfer the management of about 200,000 acres of federal land to the state as a trust. It would seem wise that the transferred lands be near or adjacent to current state owned lands. This

would give the two governments involved an opportunity to resolve legal and other conflicts before advancing to a broader scale transfer. A pilot transfer might also serve to calm reservations that many outside of Idaho would have about these lands being abused or mismanaged.

agree that Special Areas with
We also need to address how the special areas would be handled. Within the federal lands we have designated wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, research natural areas, national monuments, national parks, botanical areas and national recreation areas. It would seem wise to not transfer these lands to the state because of the restrictions placed upon them by Congress.

Should be managed by the Federal Government

Looking at the past track record of the federal government managing our lands, one must conclude that there has to be a better way because I am sure there is not a worse way! Unless we can resolve this situation, rural Idaho is destined to be dominated by retirement homes, empty buildings and vast acreages of scorched, empty land and we will be responsible. We owe it to the future generations to figure this out!