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September 11, 2014

For the PUBLIC RECORD on HCR21

Federal Lands Interim Committee Members,

I oppose the state of Idaho seeking the ownership or management of federally owned public lands.

First, these lands are owned by the American people, not the people of any one state and are one of the chief factors unifying the United States. We believe in unifying concepts such as freedom and equality. We believe in the documents that articulate these ideas. These concepts provide abstract principles that bind us.

But we are also bound by tangible events and possessions. Our history, for instance, has been shared and is embedded in our national conscience. Public forests and grasslands provide a commonly owned American landscape valued just as much by a person from South Carolina as an Idahoan. That is how it should remain, in order for the country maintain tangible evidence of its shared interests and values.

Second, at its inception as a state Idaho forever revoked any claim to unappropriated public lands lying within its boundaries. The Idaho Constitution's ARTICLE XXI, SECTION 19 reads as follows (The pertinent passage is highlighted):

**SECTION 19. RELIGIOUS FREEDOM GUARANTEED - DISCLAIMER OF TITLE TO INDIAN LANDS.** It is ordained by the state of Idaho that perfect toleration of religious sentiment shall be secured, and no inhabitant of said state shall ever be molested in person or property on account of his or her mode of religious worship. **And the people of the state of Idaho do agree and declare that we forever disclaim all right and title to the unappropriated public lands lying within the boundaries thereof,** and to all lands lying within said limits owned or held by any Indians or Indian tribes; and until the title thereto shall have been extinguished by the United States, the same shall be subject to the disposition of the United States, and said Indian lands shall remain under the absolute jurisdiction and control of the congress of the United States; that the lands belonging to citizens of the United States, residing without the said state of Idaho, shall never be taxed at a higher rate than the lands belonging to the residents thereof. That no taxes shall be imposed by the state on the lands or property therein belonging to, or which may hereafter be purchased by, the United States, or reserved for its use. And the debts and liabilities of this territory shall be assumed and paid by the state of Idaho. That this ordinance shall be

irrevocable, without the consent of the United States and the people of the state of Idaho.

Third, the state of Idaho already owns substantial, managed public land. Because state government tends to be subject to economic pressures applied by special interest groups, I believe continued federal ownership and oversight would be more immune to local lobbying. I want public lands managed so multiple values are honored--for instance, water quality protection, sustainable logging, and habitat preservation. Having dealt with various Idaho state agencies, I believe they struggle to achieve such a balance, tend to favor economic development and yield to local pressure. The state policy advocated for controlling wolves would be an example of this.

Fourth, the current push to obtain state control of federal land is a renewal of old efforts--specifically the Sagebrush Rebellion and the Wise Use campaign. These campaigns went nowhere, and I do not want my tax money wasted in this pointless endeavor. Perhaps a more productive approach is to reach agreements with federal agencies so that more revenue is produced from federal land through a variety of activities. This seems feasible to me, if the state's interest is obtaining increased revenue.

If the state's interest is to acquire federal land in order to excessively extract resources, create economic development, and privatize it either by lease or sale, this is a very different goal, which I oppose.

Fifth, if states were allowed to acquire federal land, they would face a huge fiscal problem. How would any state and its citizens pay the federal government and the American people for title to national land and its natural resources?

Finally, it is currently politically popular to be opposed to the federal government. Doing so garners votes, especially in conservative states such as Idaho. Seeking to acquire federal land should not be motivated by efforts to win elections. Federal ownership of land in Idaho has had its problems but has generally served us well--giving us open access, providing wildlife habitat and clean water, and supporting local economies. I believe federal land ownership and management of its public lands should continue. I urge you to devote your energy to reaching agreements with federal agencies that generate income while preserving the values federal land ownership provides.

Sincerely,

Wes Hanson