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Federal Lands Interim Committee Hearing Statement

The idea to transfer Federal lands to the State of Idaho reminds me of a movie I once saw, entitled "Dumb and Dumber". It was a comedy, but I daresay this proposal falls squarely between the movie genres of tragedy and farce. A tragedy, because of all the taxpayer time and money wasted in this ill-thought-out effort, and a farce because this is just an obvious and very transparent ploy to garner publicity for political reasons by polarizing the general public on what is an absurd and clearly unconstitutional proposal.

In testifying, I'm going to borrow heavily from an excellent book, "These American Lands" (Zaslowsky and Watkins), which cost me a whopping \$15.00 ten years ago, which had former Speaker Lawrence Denny and Senator Chuck Winder bothered to read, would have saved the taxpayers and the State of Idaho \$60,985.00 dollars.

*to other
committee
members*

The book opens with the introduction, "The View From Home, describing the visual difference between private and public (i.e. Federal) lands. You can plant flowers in a toilet in your front yard, build a ramshackle hut, or own a sheetrock mansion with fortified fences and gates. You can have a tidy yard or a messy yard, an eyesore, or a landscapers dream, and you can sell your property if you so desire and reap profits (unless the bank owns it). The authors wisely wrote, "Our own property expresses ourselves; we do what we like with the land we own".

But public land is different from private land; we don't get to do **just** what **we** like with it, and for good reason. Public land is owned by all Americans, each and every one of us well beyond Idaho, and "belongs to that portion of the continent that will never be subdivided and subject to impulse", "impulse" being the operative word. Because impulse, in our culture, translates to "the need to maximize profits as quickly as possible". In case you haven't noticed, the BLM and Forest Service are not-for-profit organizations and all Americans, including Idahoans, benefit from this arrangement.

For example, I recently spoke with a representative from the BLM and asked for average fire suppression costs over a three year period, 2011 to 2013. Be aware that those years were not considered to be bad fire years. That figure came to \$32.7 million dollars. They also gave me a caveat, that this figure did not include Forest Service or Tribal costs, nor very expensive air-support costs. Add those other costs, and you're probably approaching \$50 million. In a State that cannot fund its schools adequately, has a deteriorating infrastructure, and depends on Federal dollars to shore up barley farmers that have lost their crops or are in need of cheap irrigation water, where do you plan to come up with the money for fire suppression, which is only one aspect out of the myriads of other land

management issues? Let me guess, your plan is to sell or lease our public lands to the highest bidder, consume and/or extract every resource available while leaving a blighted landscape for future generations of Idahoans and Americans.

How do I know this? Because this is what we humans have done in the past, what we do currently and will do in the future, if natural resources are put up on the privatized chopping block. Without federal management you get short term, unsustainable monetary gain, also known as “impulse”. Are you aware that the BLM and Forest Service have mandates to manage the land for multiple-use, to balance resource extraction with recreation? They do this quite well as not one particular entity or resource user seems to be entirely happy with the rules and regulations now in place. This is how democracy works. Take a look at the BLM or FS web sites to see all that they do with shrinking budgets, its mind boggling! They deal with diverse issues such as grazing rights, mineral leases, threatened and endangered species, campground garbage collection, noxious weeds and invasive species. And speaking of noxious weeds and invasive species, they have to deal with the likes of the Cliven Bundys of the world. I don’t envy our public servants.

In conclusion, your proposal is, besides being unconstitutional, totally unacceptable to we, the American people. Perpetuation, protection and shared multiple use of all publicly held resources begins with the recognition that public land is not an anomaly in American life, but an integral part of it. The idea of Federal land management and protection along with the creation of National Parks ranks among the few thoroughly American contributions to world culture. To paraphrase Ken Burns (of PBS fame), the creation of these parks and federally protected lands was, as his special was titled, “America’s Best Idea”.

Please don’t give Idaho a black eye for making us known for having one of America’s Worst Ideas.