



Western Roundup

HCN

Sagebrush Rebellion brushfires scorch feds

The so-called "Sagebrush Rebellion" has begun, and an Idaho senator says it looks as if it may become a revolution of sorts. Rebels in several Western states are protesting what they consider to be the federal government's interference in local affairs and are demanding that federal lands be returned to state ownership.

Attorney generals from the Western states attended a meeting of the rebels in Reno, Nev., Sept. 5-7. The Council of State Governments, based in San Francisco, Calif., called the meeting to discuss battle plans for the rebellion.

One of the topics discussed was Sen. Orrin G. Hatch's (R-Utah) bill to give Western federal lands to the states. Senators from Arizona, Alaska, Nevada and Wyoming have joined Hatch as co-sponsors.

Proposals to transfer federal lands have cropped up often in Western states, where the federal government owns from 33 percent (Montana) to 87 percent (Nevada) of the land. Now, however, the move seems to have gained momentum as a result of indignation over grazing management and wilderness evaluations on federal lands.

In Utah, the Grand County Commissioners openly defied a Bureau of Land Management order closing access to Negro Bill Canyon, a potential wilderness area, and instructed the county sheriff to arrest any BLM employee who tries to barricade the canyon. BLM officials, who are concerned about protecting wildlife and vegetation in the canyon, have filed a suit in federal court saying the access is controlled by BLM. The stream there flows year-round, which is rare in desert country.

In Idaho, ranchers told a Senate Interior subcommittee that the federal government must become more sensitive to the users of public land and must rehabilitate the range without causing economic hardship for ranchers. BLM has proposed reducing grazing rights in one district by 35 percent while overgrazed land is restored.

Sen. James McClure (R-Idaho), who chaired the hearing, said, "A good number

of people are talking in terms of a revolution. It is essential to dig to the root of the problem and solve it before a revolution becomes one of epidemic proportions."

Hatch's bill (S. 1680) would give states up to 544 million acres of BLM and Forest Service lands in 13 states. It would not

affect national parks, monuments, bird and wildlife refuges, recreation areas, or designated wildernesses and wild rivers.

Hatch says the "strongest possible" environmental safeguards have been written into the bill. However, he says one of the main advantages of the transfer would be

development of the fossil fuels, uranium and timber that have been locked up by federal policies.

While Hatch says the transfer would open a "mother-lode" of new revenue for the states, a United Press International article says the rebellion could prove costly. The state now receives 50 percent of mineral royalties and a share in other user fees, as well as payments in lieu of taxes. The federal agencies also bring several million dollars into the states for their own operating budgets, including salaries. Reporter Peter Gillins figures the state transfer could cost Utah anywhere from \$9 million to \$63 million, depending upon how much acreage the state acquired.

Hatch is expecting support from a number of public land users organizations. He already has the blessing of the Nevada legislature, which has filed a lawsuit challenging the federal government's right to regulate the public lands. Hatch expects similar actions by Arizona, Utah, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska legislators.



Cover of Snake River Birds of Prey Summary Report

Idaho

Birds of Prey ruffles irrigators' feathers

A controversy has been touched off in Southern Idaho by the Bureau of Land Management's proposed 515,257-acre Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area. The designation would protect the food source of the many raptors inhabiting the present 31,000-acre Birds of Prey Natural Area, in particular the Townsend's ground squirrel. The estimated 200 pairs of prairie falcons in the area depend largely upon this rodent.

Some of the area's farmers and politicians oppose the proposal because they had hoped to see the area eventually irrigated for agriculture. Under the Carey Act, 300,000 acres can be converted to agriculture. Applications have already been made to farm more than 80,000 acres. These applications would be made void if the National Conservation Area is approved by Congress. Studies have shown that agricultural use of land drastically reduces the ground squirrel population.

According to state legislator Ken Robison, all existing uses could continue, including agriculture; livestock grazing; National Guard training; oil, gas, and geothermal leasing; and public recreation, in-

cluding use by off-road vehicles. In an editorial in *The Idaho Statesman*, Robison points out that Idaho's farmers already suffer from low prices caused by overproduction and that more irrigated land would aggravate this situation. Irrigation of this land would be energy-intensive and would cause a loss of hydroelectric generation downstream on the Snake River, and new sources of energy, probably power plants, would have to be provided, Robison says.

At an Aug. 2 hearing held in Boise by the BLM, Bob Turner of the National Audubon Society stated that the Snake River Canyon held the world's largest nesting population of raptors, and the need for the preservation of its food supply is critical. Speaking in opposition to the plan, Oscar Field, president of the Idaho Farm Bureau, asked "If the hen that lays my breakfast egg can survive on 2 square feet, why does it take 2,000 acres for a hawk?"

Public comments on the proposal will be accepted until Sept. 14 and should be sent to District Manager, BLM, 230 Collins Road, Boise, ID 83702.

Montana

Copper exploration OK in wilderness

A mining company's plan to search for copper in the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness of Montana has been approved by the Forest Service. The company, ASARCO Inc., has 140 claims in the Chicago Peak area. According to Dave Morton, Cabinet District Forest ranger, the federal mining law and the 1964 Wilderness Act both allow exploration for minerals on these claims.

The company plans to transport two drilling rigs into the wilderness by helicopter. Workers would camp outside the wilderness and hike in daily, carrying light equipment. About 850 gallons of fuel to run the rigs would be stored within the wilderness.

The environmental assessment done by the Forest Service before approval notes that grizzly bears that inhabit the area might suffer a negative impact. Other impacts might include contamination of alpine lakes in the area and reduction of their volume of water, as each rig would require 600 gallons of water per day; possible chemical contamination of the soil from the drilling process; oil contamination from the diesel fuel; trail and drilling site compaction; and short term air quality degradation.

A group called the Western Sanders County Involved Citizens has appealed the Forest Service's approval, contending it is illegal because of several deficiencies in the Forest Service's review of the plan. A full environmental impact statement should have been prepared, and the impact on endangered or threatened species was inadequately studied, according to the citizen's group. In addition, they charge that the Forest Service kept such a low profile in its study of the project that the public was inadequately informed and not allowed to take a role in its approval or disapproval.

The Northern Regional Forester, Tom Coston, denied the group's appeal, but they may appeal to the chief of the Forest Service in Washington, D.C.

Colorado

Pesticides spur farm workers' suit

Pesticides sprayed near Ault, Colo., have led to a civil lawsuit by two migrant farm workers. Santos Lira and Hope Acosta were working in an onion field with several other workers when a plane sprayed the field for control of thrips, using toxaphene and parathion-methyl parathion mixed in water. The pilot contends he didn't spray the workers directly but left about an acre around them untouched.

The workers reported symptoms of herbicide poisoning soon after the spraying, including rashes, itching, headache and vomiting.

Marvin Feingold, attorney for the plaintiffs, says that several federal and state agencies are authorized to protect farm workers from pesticides but do little or nothing about the problem. Feingold maintains that poisoning by pesticides is common among farm workers but complaints from them are few because of fear of reprisal.