



High Country News

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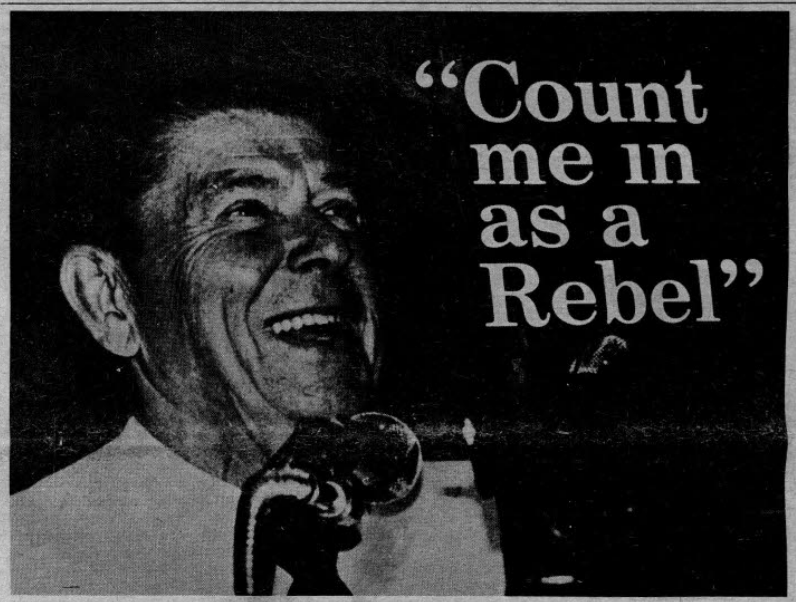
A Wyoming mountain man describes a near-fatal foray into the Wind River Mountains, circa 1920. Makeshift snowshoes, a ball of paraffin-soaked string and will-power got him out alive.

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Rebels revel in new power, polish

by Joan Nice

SALT LAKE CITY — A dark-haired singer in a white hat belts a song into the microphone: "The Sagebrush Rebellion is people gettin' down to earrrth..." The ballroom sound system blasts the words over the heads of a well-dressed crowd of 500 that is delicately spooning frothy desserts out of parfait glasses. A few people grimace at the volume. "Gettin' down to earrrth..."

The chandeliers, tapestries and mirrored walls of the Little America hotel here have toned down most people's raw exuberance, but their excitement about their cause, the Sagebrush Rebellion, can't be contained.

"It's a religious festival," whispers one observer. "They're reciting their creed."

One factor in the fervency here is the outcome of the national election. Now the Rebels not only have a sympathetic president, but also half a dozen conservative Westerners pulling the public land strings in the Senate. Their goal of turning federally managed public lands over to the states looks more tangible than ever before.

A huge black-and-white photo of an exuberant Ronald Reagan overlaid

with the slogan "Count me in as a Rebel" stands behind the podium. In a telegram read aloud at the opening session yesterday, Reagan pledged to "work toward a Sagebrush solution." The personal message, despite its vagueness, drew hand-chapping applause.

Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) tells the crowd that people on Capitol Hill who used to snub him are now "rubbin' round my ankles like old tomcats."

"How does it feel to be surrounded by conservatives?" a jubilant blond Utah official asks a reporter sitting next to him at lunch.

The meeting here is part celebration, part show. In his opening address, Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch (R) gives an ostentatious welcome to members of the national media, including U.S. News and World Report, the L.A. Times, the New York Times and the wire services.

"Seldom in life does one participate in an event which is obviously of great historical significance," Hatch tells the crowd. "The building of the Panama Canal, the placing of a man on the moon, these are uniquely spectacular events which future generations cannot forget."

"We are participants in just such an experience. The consequences of what we now are about to do will have an impact upon the West and future generations that cannot be measured. There is no doubt that it will constitute the major factor in the political and economic future of the West."

A year ago, that sort of rhetoric would have been viewed as pure pie-in-the-sky. But the election has changed all that. Now Hatch's and Rep. James Santini's (D-Nev.) Sagebrush Rebellion bills are out on the legislative table, they claim.

Under Hatch's "Western Lands Distribution and Regional Equalization Act of 1979" state land commissions would be allowed to take over "unreserved unappropriated public lands" — about 600 million acres nationwide. By the bill's definition, that would mean state control of most wilderness areas, national recreation areas and national forests, as well as lands now controlled by the Bureau of Land Management.

National parks, monuments and wildlife and migratory bird sanctuaries established prior to 1979 would remain in federal hands, as would Indian re-

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ORRIN HATCH has emerged as the Rebellion's most outspoken proponent.

Rebels...



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servations and lands needed for access to dams, highways and other federal property.

In Alaska, for example, none of the parks, monuments and refuges established in the recently passed Alaska lands legislation would remain in federal ownership, because they were established after the bill's 1979 deadline. The bill would also allow states to man-

age places such as the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana and Desolation Canyon in Utah.

Santini's bill, unlike Hatch's, would leave Forest Service land in federal ownership.

Nevadans started the move, by claiming ownership of 49 million acres of public land within their borders. Five states followed with similar legislation: Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming and Washington. California and Colorado began formal studies of the idea.

Since the election, however, the Rebels have decided that their best chances lie not with state battles in the courts, but in congressional action.

NO NUTS

As the movement's hopes have grown, so has its concern about public opinion.

"We are not a bunch of nuts," says Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens (R). "We are not a bunch of greedy miners and cattlemen," Utah county commissioner Calvin Black tells the crowd.

If it is not acceptable to sound eccentric or covetous here, expressions of environmental concern are encouraged. John Harmer, the chief executive officer of LASER (League for Advancement of States Equal Rights) sets the tone: "I, too, am an environmentalist and will take second place to no one. The stewardship of the earth is a sacred trust." If the MX missile, synfuels de-

velopment, nuclear waste and nerve gas disposal are any indication of the federal government's environmental sensitivity, how could the states do worse, Rebels ask?

Compromise also seems to be grudgingly accepted as the order of the day. "I'm not advocating we get out the flintlocks," says Black, who is president of LASER. "Maybe we have matured or degenerated, I don't know."

Hatch is more emphatically conciliatory: "If my bill is inadequate in any way, I'm not above changing it."

One speaker after another underlines an apparent concession made by the Rebels from earlier stands. Once, many of them had sought to get the public lands into private ownership. Now the leadership is publicly advocating state retention of the lands.

The public domain in the West is so valuable, Hatch tells reporters, that "the governor would be impeached and the legislature removed if the lands were taken out of the public domain."

Dean Rhoads, a Nevada rancher and state legislator, has promised to push for a state constitutional amendment that would assure state retention of the lands. Hatch opposes any such requirement in the federal bill, however, as a usurpation of state rights.

As he explains his aims, Hatch pleads for unity. At the close of the conference he gets a unanimously approved resolution in support of his bill "or a bill like it." But whenever the big group breaks up into workshops, mild bickering begins. Various factions can't resist occasional potshots at the leadership's recent willingness to settle for revision instead of revolt. And the issue of final ownership remains an undercurrent in the discussions.

A reporter asks LASER's John Harmer to list the non-profit foundation's financial backers. He flatly refuses on the grounds that liberal groups such as Common Cause are not required to reveal their sources of income.

Despite Harmer's tight lips, hints about LASER's constituency lie on the name tags at the \$145-admission conference: Conoco, Citizens for Mining, Club 20, National Inholders Association, Wyoming Farm Bureau, U.S. Borax, Stewart Capital Corp., International Snowmobilers Association, Louisiana Pacific, representatives of state and county governments, and teachers from Western colleges and universities. If, as the speakers suggest, this is a second American revolution, the generals and subordinate officers are gathered here, not the foot

soldiers.

Former Colorado Rep. Wayne Aspinall (D), speaking at an economics workshop, says the movement is a return to traditional American values. His gray hair combed back like the neat rows of a plowed field, Aspinall makes no apologies for judging things in terms of economic impact. In fact, the small, intense man is suspicious of people who don't measure by the dollar — "people who've grown up in an age when everything was given to them."

While those who wrest resources from public lands have to pay a fee, those who enjoy the amenities go free. This amounts to government subsidy "to the users of wilderness, water facilities and national parks," Aspinall says.

He doesn't like subsidies, no matter who receives them. "I'm 85 years old, and that makes me eligible for so many government-funded advantages it embarrasses me," he says.

700,000 ACRES, 600 BIRDS

Like Aspinall, many people here believe that money is the most reliable measure of value. At the economics workshop a gray-haired Elmore County, Idaho, resident scoffs at the federal government's wasteful business practices. Where they could be using the land to grow crops, "they want to lock up 700,000 acres for 600 birds," he says, shaking his head. "If you can figure out the economics of that you're better with a pencil than I am."

On the land in question the Interior Department has proposed an expansion of the Snake River Birds of Prey Natural Area. As the man sits down he mutters, "700,000 acres — for chicken hawks!"

One of the economics speakers, Allen LeBaron of Utah State University, discusses a question raised by the movement's critics: Would the management load bankrupt states if federal lands were transferred?

A study he conducted for the Four Corners Regional Commission leads him to conclude: "Sure we're going to have to spend some money, but it ought to be do-able." Some states would break even on revenues from land-users, he says, but most would have to spend one to two percent of their state budget on the management chores.

Environmentalists have said this study underestimates both the costs and the income to be derived from the public lands.

LASER consultant and Utah legislator Mac Haddow says state govern-

mentalism Society, which he founded; Samuel Beckett; and John Davidson.

You could count on something strange to pop out during a long night of typesetting. Amidst the "Hotlines" and editorials there would come a headline reading: "News editor laments: 'I'm having Abbie Hoffman's baby!'"

After a few years with Will, though, we know that every office, town or family is understaffed without one of his ilk. And yet he has no ilk. He is, as the lawyers say, sui generis.

And we will no doubt awake every winter late at night when Joyce's birthday rolls around, imagining strange noises on the porch — clunking, stumbling, the dissonance of numb fingers on guitar strings, a strange yodel, a high, egotistic cackle. Not Christmas, not Santa Claus. Hardly.

Wassail, Will!

— the staff

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Dear Friends,

Do any of your acquaintances mix Southern Comfort or rum with Diet Pepsi, talk rhapsodically about staying home all afternoon watching John Davidson on television, or stroll through rural Wyoming streets at two a.m. on James Joyce's birthday singing Irish tunes?

Do you know anyone who considers a grainy photograph of a yellow lightbulb worth saving, or who starts a betting pool on whatever international disaster is currently featured on the evening news?

Have you ever sat in a small town bar with a fellow wearing an odd European hat, drinking a great deal of alcoholic beverage, saying very little and occasionally laughing a high, egregious

laugh at...well, at nobody knows what?

It is time to say a word about Will Murphy, our incongruous office apostate. Will has held down the most thankless jobs HCN has to offer — running the circulation department and typesetting. He is moving on now: commandeering the news department at the local radio station and planning to return to school next year.

It's hard to know what brought Will to us, except perhaps a love of asymmetry. He is as far from "environmentalism" as the president of Peabody Coal. The longest hike he's ever taken was to the corner drug store, and he views snow not as skiing material but as a kind of celestial dandruff, to be kept off the collar. He does not take us seriously — in fact, it's hard to know what he does take seriously, except perhaps the Fremont County Yellow

ments would get more income from lands than their federal counterpart. Because states would not have the federal government's "chilling effect" on mineral exploration and development, increased royalties should be worked into the equation, he says.

An official from Grand County, Utah, famous for its July 4 bulldozing of Bureau of Land Management roadless areas, tells the group that his local economy is being "smothered" by an excess of federal land. He goes so far as to broach the taboo question: "Why not get this to a lower level? We do want to sell some lands. Let's spell that out."

The Utah mining industry representative sitting next to him cheers him on. "Let's not backpedal on this," he says.

Later, at a workshop on mining, participants seem more to accept the idea that lands should go to the states, but less excited about the crusade.

Russell Babcock of the Northwest Mining Association says it will be difficult to organize mining support of the Sagebrush Rebellion "if the Reagan administration pulls back the regulatory curtain a little and says, 'We're going to be good hosts.'" Some states such as Utah and Colorado might be sympathetic to mining, but others such as Montana and California might offer even tougher stipulations than the feds, he says. Nevertheless, Babcock is willing to "investigate and get involved" in the rebellion.

The man who is leading the mining session, William Dresher of the University of Arizona's College of Mines, seems somewhat more diffident. For him the rebellion is a forum for airing gripes in an effective, dramatic way — sort of a "Boston Tea Party" — not a serious attempt to alter land ownership patterns in the country.

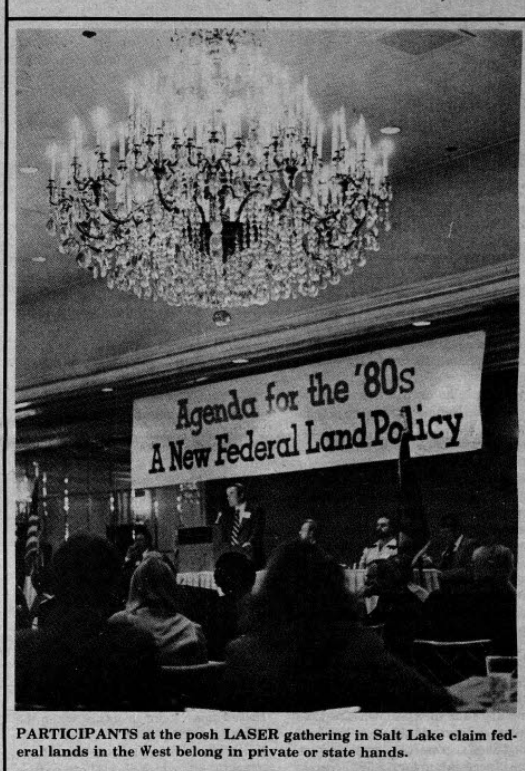
Speakers at the workshop on mining paint a picture of a hostile bureaucracy in Washington, filled with "transplanted environmentalists," that is blocking production vital to the country's energy and security needs. When environmentalists don't get their way through friends in high places, they use the courts — irresponsibly, some say. "I'm fed up with the opportunities available to every extremist to file a \$30 lawsuit," says a lobbyist for the American Mining Congress.

In the audience a representative for U.S. Borax suggests that more mining firms try lobbying on Capitol Hill. "Washington hears the environmental point of view because they have their troops back there. It doesn't hear much about mining," he says.

Rebels assume that the federal government is, through regulations and withdrawals, blocking production of essential materials. Dresher says, "Over two-thirds of the public domain has been withdrawn from access for mineral exploration, development or production."

Environmentalists dispute these figures. In Utah, for instance, less than 10 percent of federal lands are withdrawn from mineral entry, according to Dick Carter of the Utah Wilderness Association. What's more, he says, the largest withdrawals are for the Wendover Bombing Range and an oil shale development site, not for conservation purposes. As to the government's "chilling effect" on private enterprise, Carter says that mineral production has been at record levels in recent years.

If the miners have some qualms about giving lands to the states, they are not alone here. Two representatives



PARTICIPANTS at the posh LASER gathering in Salt Lake claim federal lands in the West belong in private or state hands.

of the movement's idea factories make a strong case for putting the public domain into private hands. Both David Theroux of the Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research in San Francisco and John Baden of the Political Economy Research Center in Bozeman, Mont., think that trading the federal government for the state is swapping one bad manager for another. They say that private ownership would not only increase production efficiency, but would also strengthen environmental protection efforts, by providing a financial incentive to look out for the land.

Theroux stands quietly in the back of most sessions. Baden makes his views known.

At the congressional hearing that follows the meeting, Baden asks Congress "to permit environmental interest groups to obtain fee simple ownership of wilderness lands." The lands would be managed more sensitively by, say, the Audubon Society, than by the government, he says. If the landowning

environmental group decided to block mining in an area it owned, it would have to "face the opportunity cost of that decision," Baden says. What's more, the proposal would "reduce the subsidy now obtained by these groups," which do not pay for their use of the wilderness, Baden says.

"Sell wilderness to the environmentalists?" House Mining Subcommittee Chairman Santini looks astonished. "That gives me some tantalizing food for thought."

For now, Baden and Theroux's schemes probably won't get beyond the conceptual stage. Their libertarian bent, like the miners' laissez-faire capitalism, is viewed as bad politics by the Rebel leaders. Somehow they remain a part of the anti-government Rebel family, however, if only distant cousins.

Clearly outside the clan is another group of dissenters who show up late in the conference — the card-carrying en-

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vironmentalists. The steep registration fee apparently kept most of them out the first two days. But after LASER's Saturday morning press conference, Audubon Society volunteer Jim Pissot steps up to the press room microphone.

Pissot, joined by three associates, chides LASER for what he considers its elitist bent: "If it costs \$145 to get into a conference like this, we wonder what it will cost to get into these lands (when the states take over)."

Another member of the environmentalist panel questions the states' ability to protect the land from unscrupulous developers. None of the Western states have the battery of protective legislation available to the federal government, such as the Wilderness, Endangered Species, National Environmental Policy, Antiquities, and the Clean Air acts.

"No one condones a sometimes ineffective and non-responsive bureaucracy," says Charles Callison of the Public Lands Institute. But the answer is to change the bureaucracy, not abandon it, he says.

ACHING FOR CHANGE

Rep. Santini's hearings have already begun in an adjacent room, so few media representatives and fewer conferees listen to the tiny band that shanghaied LASER's press room. But even before the environmentalists appeared, the Rebels hinted at the big questions that would be raised as soon as they left the conference hall: Why should voters, most of whom reside in the East, let Western states take charge of hundreds of millions of acres of energy-rich lands? For that matter, why should people in the West let them do it?

Up until recently most of the Sagebrush leaders probably didn't expect to succeed. Hatch admits that "part of the point is to keep the bureaucracy on the defensive so it has to treat us with some sort of decency."

A poll taken in 1979 by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona showed that only a third of a random sample of 1,025 people in the Rocky Mountain states supported the Rebellion. Only in Nevada did a majority of people favor divestiture of federal lands.

But the Rebels see the Reagan win as an indication that old polls may no longer apply — that people are aching for change. That analysis has given them the courage to try for more than symbolic protest.

For now, the Rebels have gone home to their cows, corporations and Congress. But they'll be heard from again soon.

The next step, as outlined at the conference, is for Rebels to begin courting urban and Eastern America. In the East, they will say that the states can manage these lands more efficiently, producing more of the food, fiber and minerals that are essential to the nation's survival. In the West, they will try to sell divestiture as emancipation. "Perhaps the rebellion marks a time for the Intermountain West to stand on its own feet, cut the (federal) apron strings, and take the bad with the good," a Utah State University report says. To make sure the message is clear, the Rebels will try to unite the West to speak with one voice.

They know that is no small job. To most observers their chances look slim. But a year ago who would have thought a self-proclaimed Sagebrush Rebel could successfully battle his way to the presidency?