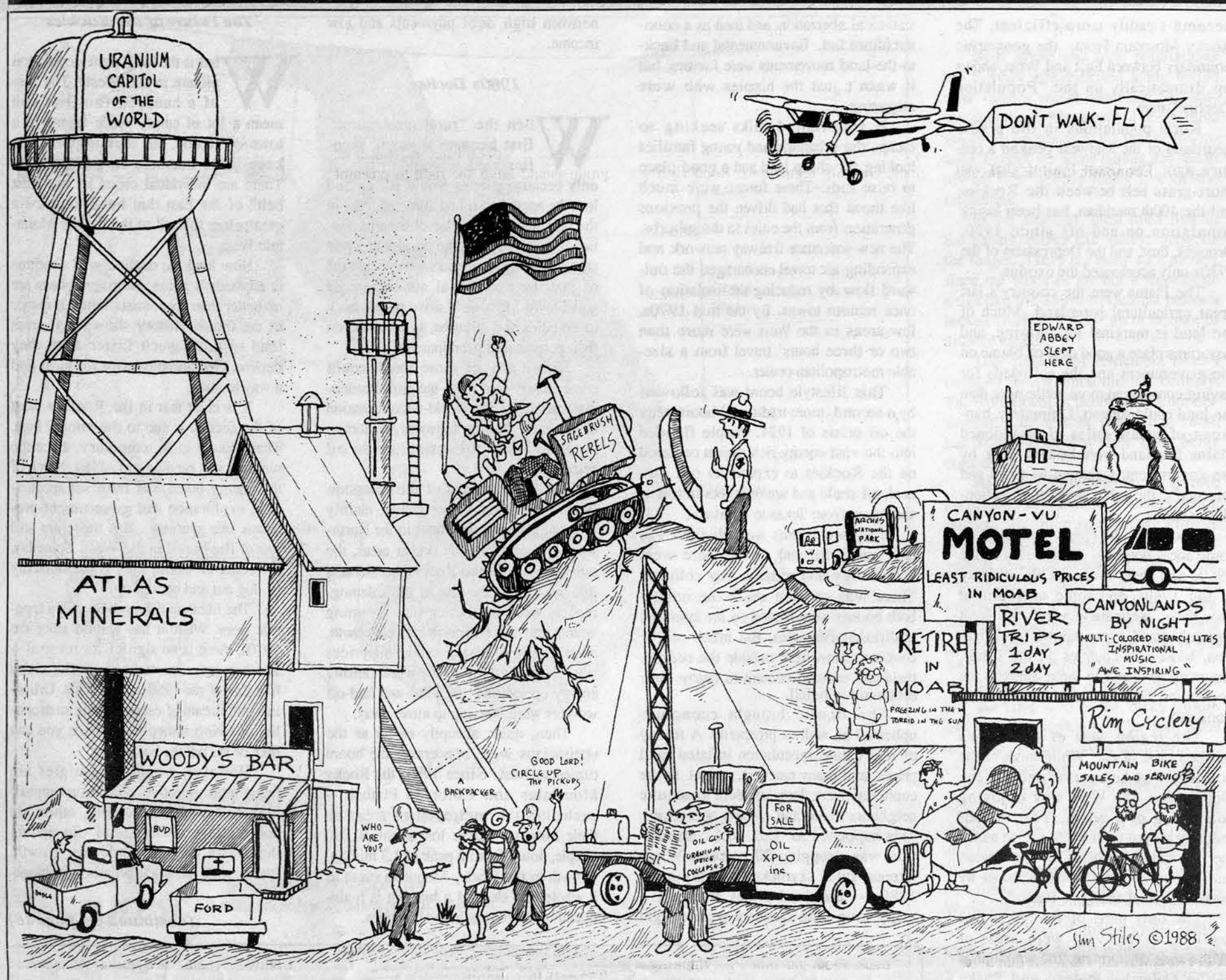




Boom! Boom! Boom!

War on the Colorado Plateau

In the 1970s, all that stood between the people of southeastern Utah and their dreams of high paying jobs in the mineral and energy industries was the federal government and its wilderness study areas. In this first of a four-part series, Ray Wheeler describes how southeastern Utah routed the feds and, for all practical purposes, privatized the public land.

by Raymond Wheeler

After the Party's Over

It's 5:00 pm on a lovely spring afternoon in Moab, Utah. The sun blazes in through an open doorway, pooling on the floor of the Grand County Courthouse. It has been a long and tedious county commission meeting; I am praying for a quick end. But commission chairman Jimmie Walker has one last item. There is a problem at the Moab city dump.

Things just haven't been the same at the dump since the Chamber of Commerce issued its now famous nationwide challenge. Moab, declared the Chamber, had the most scenic dump in the nation. The Chamber's Scenic Dump Photo

Contest had brought a flood of publicity from all over the country.

Unfortunately, notoriety entails obligations. Now that Moab's dump was more famous than the town, one had to maintain its image. The problem, explained Walker, was scavenging at the dump. One could find people scavenging there most any time of day. Sometimes there would be two or three parties carefully sorting through the trash, pulling out aluminum cans, old clothes, furniture... perhaps even food.

As county commissioners go, Jimmie Walker is one of the best. He knows his job, he knows his constituents, and he knows Grand County like the back of his weathered hand. This was a matter of civic decorum -- nothing more, nothing less. The people of Moab were beginning to feel like strangers in their own

their own dump, like visitors to a creep show. It was unnerving as hell to unload your garbage into the waiting arms of scavengers. Something had to be done.

Walker had a plan. The county commission would issue an ordinance requiring all dump scavengers to apply for permits. Along with the permit, a business license would naturally be required -- "at an address zoned for that kind of commercial activity." Having met these requirements, scavengers would then pay a fee: "\$25, \$50, \$100 -- I don't care what you make it."

Walker leaned back in his chair, sucking contemplatively on a life-saver. "Well?"

The other commissioners were smiling. You had to hand it to Jimmie -- the man was a master. All the same, one commissioner seemed apprehensive.

"Jimmie... have you ever been up to the dump to see who it is up there doing the scavenging?"

"No."

"Well, you'd be mighty damn surprised to see who some of those people are."

"Well I don't much care who it is, but I'm getting pretty darned sick of seeing people hauling stuff back as fast as we haul it up."

We all had a chuckle, but behind it there was an ache in the air. Those scavengers weren't tramps or latter-day hip-

pies. Many were lifelong residents of Moab -- people like Blackie. I heard about Blackie later that evening, while sharing a dish of ice cream with my neighbor, Ruth Brown.

"Lots of people go up there to the dump every day," Ruth was telling me. "Like Blackie and his wife Sandy -- they used to go up there a couple of times a week."

Like many Moab residents, Blackie was a miner who lost his job when the Atlas Uranium Mill shut down. Blackie was a good carpenter and handyman, but in Moab, where everybody is a carpenter and handyman, that didn't pay the bills. As a last resort, Blackie and his wife began paying regular visits to the Moab City Dump.

"You know, his wife died last year," said Ruth. "And Blackie just ain't been the same since..."

Blackie's predicament is far from unique. In just six years, the town of Moab -- and most of southeastern Utah -- has undergone a metamorphosis most of us encounter only in history books. Since 1980, shot down by the simultaneous collapse of the oil, uranium, coal and potash markets, southeastern Utah has banked into an economic tailspin unlike anything since the Great Depression. Between 1980 and 1986, Grand County lost more than a thousand jobs -- thirty percent of the county's nonfarm wage

and salary employment. The official unemployment rate has soared as high as 19 percent and the county's population has plummeted nearly 20 percent.

"We're looking at unemployment rates which are at depression, not recession, levels," says University of Utah Bureau of Economic and Business Research director Thayne Robson. "We've had communities with 22 to 25 percent unemployment rates in the past few years."

Since 1982, southern Utah has been falling, out of control, into a seemingly bottomless economic black hole.

"Every time we think we've bottomed out and reached a floor -- as established by local (power plant) consumption of our coal, with a few fortunate contracts with companies outside the area -- then something happens, like the Wilburg mine fire, and we have even more loss, and more businesses closing," says Bill Howe, director of the Southeast Utah Association of County Governments.

...Ruth and I finished our ice cream in silence, staring off across the city of Moab, watching the alpenglow die on the wall of rose-colored sandstone that soars above the Moab City Dump. As day slipped toward night, I found myself slipping backward in time...

The Ghost of Christmases Past

Just seven years ago, Moab's economic and political future looked radically different. On the morning of the commissioners' meeting, tracking backwards through the annals of the town's newspaper, the *Moab Times-Independent*, I was drawn, in Henry Adam's phrase, by "invisible lines of force" to a remarkable issue: that of November 20, 1980. On that third week of November, the town of Moab, Utah, had achieved the pinnacle of its desire. Three front-page headlines told the tale.

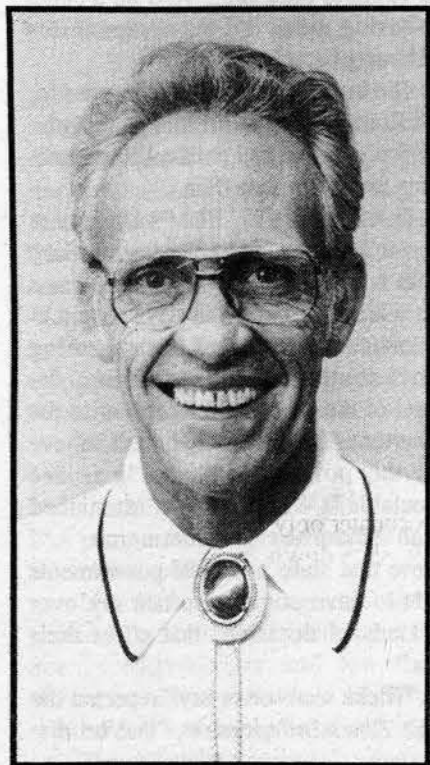
BLM HAS DROPPED OVER HALF OF WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS IN THE MOAB AREA

NEGRO BILL CANYON SQUABBLE SETTLED

S. GENE DAY WILL TRANSFER

Together, they were a ticker-tape parade for the commissioners of Grand County. This was their finest hour, their V-J and V-E days rolled into one, their triumphant moment of victory in a battle that had taken seven years to win.

In a sense, it is timeless -- this battle, this war. Timeless and cyclic. The latest



Jimmie Walker

cycle began with the introduction in Congress, in 1974, of legislation which would become the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. "FLPMA," as it was called, brought a hailstorm of new regulations governing use of Bureau of Land Management lands. Mining regulations. Grazing regulations. Road right-of-way regulations. And worst of all -- the ultimate insult to southeastern Utah -- a mandate to inventory, study and designate wilderness.

It was the wilderness study provision that was the last straw for the Grand County commissioners. That provision required the BLM to identify all lands with wilderness character and to protect them from development until Congress, in its wisdom, could pass legislation to designate wilderness.

About 80 percent of Grand County is owned by the federal government, with 90 percent of that land managed by the BLM. When BLM's first statewide wilderness inventory map was published in April 1979, the Grand County commissioners went through the roof. Between the Forest Service, Park Service and BLM wilderness inventory programs, some two-thirds of southeastern Utah was under review.

When they saw that map, the Grand County commissioners realized what was at stake: a way of life.

"Frederick Jackson Turner was wrong," says Bill Booker, a battle-scarred veteran of the tempestuous BLM wilderness inventory. "He said we lost the western frontier in the 1890s, when the urban population of the West first exceeded its rural population. But in Utah, we lost the frontier in 1976, with the enactment of FLPMA. Before FLPMA, these people could do virtually anything they wanted on the public lands."

"Back about that time I got thinking about something," Jimmie Walker recalls. "The thing that creates wars is a foreign intrusion that's trying to destroy a way of life. It's just that damn simple. The people here could recognize that, and as far as they were concerned, it was war."

When FLPMA became law in October 1976, it set off a battle that was to be waged all over the West under the name Sagebrush Rebellion. Nowhere was that battle to be as brutal -- and public -- as in Grand County, Utah.

The county commissioners' strategy had the elegant simplicity of a sumo wrestling match. If the commissioners could not change the law, they would break it.

Bulldozer Wars

In July of 1979, a Grand County road crew rammed a bulldozer through a barrier blocking vehicular access to Negro Bill Canyon, a 26,000-acre BLM wilderness inventory unit featuring 400-foot vertical walls of Navajo sandstone, slickrock domes and fins, stupendous natural bridges, and a clear, cold, perennial stream studded with waterfalls and swimming holes. With the barrier removed, a second bulldozer -- this one piloted by a local miner -- charged up the canyon for a distance of a mile and a quarter and carved more than 500 yards of new roadway across the floor of the canyon.

Since neither the miner nor the county had a right-of-way permit, as required by FLPMA, BLM Moab District Manager S. Gene Day obtained a cease and desist order, and replaced the barrier at the mouth of the canyon.

Seven days later, a Grand County bulldozer again knocked the barrier down.

BLM filed a lawsuit and once again blocked the mouth of the canyon -- this time with a steel cable.

Four days later, a Grand County road crew cut the cable.

BLM manager Day was incensed. "The issue is whether any individual or group should have the right to preempt all others for private gain," he wrote in a letter to the editor of the Moab newspaper.

Quoting Aldo Leopold's classic essay, "The Land Ethic," Day lashed out bitterly at the Grand County Commission. "Where do we draw the line on the right to explore for minerals? Must every square inch of this area, regardless of other clearly identified values, be sacrificed to mineral exploration?"

S. Gene Day

During five and a half years on the job, Day earned a reputation as a hardnosed, no-nonsense administrator. "Arrogant," some said. "Honest," said others. A feature on Day in the *Washington Post* labeled him "The Most Hated Man in Southern Utah."

In this war against FLPMA, Day was commander in chief for the enemy. "He was almost a zealot in defense of FLPMA," recalls Moab newspaper editor Sam Taylor.

"Gene Day was a hard-core environmentalist," remembers Jimmie Walker. "He thought he was God. That's what power does to you."

Since his arrival in Moab in 1975, Day had been battling violations of federal law all over the district. With the nation in an energy crisis, uranium and oil exploration were booming, and the scramble for coal, tar sands and oil shale had grown frantic. All across southern Utah, boom-crazed exploration companies were penetrating roadless areas.

In November 1976, days after the passage of FLPMA, Gulf Minerals launched a massive uranium exploration program, slicing 30 miles of roads and 22 drill pads into the heart of the 100,000-acre Mancos Mesa roadless area -- a highhorn sheep lambing area and for nearly a decade the Moab District's number one candidate for primitive area designation.

Though Gulf repeatedly promised, in writing, to reclaim all physical impacts, by 1979 it had abandoned the area, leaving the roads in place. BLM simply let the matter drop, blocking off the road with a barrier.

Within weeks, a San Juan County road crew tore down the barrier. The Gulf Minerals roads, explained commission chairman Calvin Black, were now part of the county road system, and the county had an obligation to its citizens to keep the roads open. Not the least of those citizens was Black himself, who owned 5,000 acres of mining claims in the heart of the unit.

In 1977, Cotter Corporation -- a Commonwealth Edison subsidiary with a field office in Moab -- launched an exploration program in the Dirty Devil River Canyon, blading more than 50 miles of roads and trails into the heart of a 400,000-acre wilderness inventory unit. BLM responded by accelerating its wilderness inventory, but carefully excluded Cotter's illegal roadwork by adjustments in the wilderness study area boundary. That was not accommodating enough for Cotter. Before the ink could dry on the WSA map, the firm was at it again, blasting 11 miles of new road and more than 100 drill pads into the new WSA.

Once again, BLM went to court. North of Moab, in the Book Cliffs,

Ray Wheeler



Cal Black

Anschutz, Tenneco and Palmer Oil were carving new roads across wilderness inventory units. Uranium and potash exploration companies were slashing a maze of new roads through pristine canyons and mesa tops bordering the Colorado and Green rivers. On the San Rafael Knob -- a splendid tower of bare rock at the crest of the San Rafael Swell -- two uranium companies crowded 30 miles of roads into a 7,000-acre wilderness inventory unit. To the south, uranium and oil exploration companies swarmed over the benchlands around the perimeter of White Canyon and Natural Bridges National Monument.

The grand finale of the Bulldozer Wars came on the Fourth of July, 1980, when 250 flag-waving Moab residents celebrated Independence Day with a ceremony that by now had become local tradition -- parading a bulldozer into the nearby Mill Creek Canyon Wilderness Inventory Unit. When Gene Day announced, several days later, that the bulldozer had mistakenly stopped short of the unit boundary, a Grand County crew hauled the bulldozer back to the site and extended the road until it crossed the boundary.

This act was so brazen that the commissioners were convinced they would be jailed.

"Gene Day was our biggest obstacle," recalls Jimmie Walker. "He was going to have the federal marshals come in and take us all to jail. But we had (Utah Senator) Orrin Hatch back in Washington, keeping an eye on it, to make sure they wasn't going to mess with our constitutional rights."

Psychological Warfare

That was the physical dimension of the war -- bulldozer scars, webs of seismograph lines, torn-up streambeds, drillpads, borrow-pits, slag piles, and hundreds of miles of new roads spiderwebbing the nation's last great block of pristine high desert wilderness. But there was a psychological dimension as well.

One week after publication of BLM's first wilderness inventory map for Utah, San Juan County Commissioner Cal Black stormed into a BLM public meeting. "I thought the man was drunk," recalls former BLM wilderness specialist Janet Ross. Her staff report on the incident is chilling.

"I'm not a violent man," Black reportedly said, "but I'm getting to the point where I'll blow up bridges, ruins and vehicles. We're going to start a revolution. We're going to get back our

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Boom!...

(Continued from page 17)

lands. We're going to sabotage your vehicles... You had better start going out in twos and threes, because we're going to take care of you BLMers..."

Later that same day, Black met with Utah congressman Gunn McKay. According to the *Moab Times-Independent*, "Black warned McKay that residents of the county are frustrated with the agencies and may resort to violent action." Said Black, "People might get hurt. There's going to be a lot of vandalism."

In a county where "outdoor recreation" means carving up canyon bottoms with bulldozers, ripping across fragile cryptogamic soils on off-road vehicles, and pulling apart thousand-year-old Anasazi Indian ruins in search of valuable artifacts, the "vandalism" threat must have seemed almost coy.

But when an entire pictograph panel was destroyed by vandals near Moab in April of 1980, it was as if Calvin Black's prophecy had at last been fulfilled. "An abrasive material was used to scour the thousand-year-old paintings from the wall of Wingate sandstone" marvelled the *Times-Independent*. This was no high-school prank. It was a bold and deliberate act of war.

For five years, the campaign of intimidation had been gathering momentum. For BLM employees and environmental activists, death threats were routine. In January 1978, Moab writer Fran Barnes listened in astonishment as his comments on an environmental impact statement were broadcast by the local radio station. Barnes had recommended, in a letter to the Department of Energy, that DOE terminate the operating license of the nearby Atlas Minerals uranium processing plant, since it was common knowledge that the plant was bleeding radioactive matter directly into the Colorado River. That evening, the phone began ringing with the first of a series of death threats from Atlas employees. The calls ended only when Barnes identified the callers by means of a phone tap, and promised them, in exchange for his family's safety, never again to speak out.

In May 1979, a bomb threat evacuated the BLM district office.

A typical BLM staff report of the period:

"Melvin Dalton said that if cattle

Harley C. Johnson



The dump for Moab, Utah, has a view of the LaSal Mountains

were not allowed to graze Red Canyon that he would make sure that bighorn sheep would not use the area. Melvin also said that a person could get shot going into Red Canyon. I mentioned to Melvin that he could go to jail for shooting a BLM employee. Melvin indicated that he would not be out that much if he was tossed in jail, when compared to the BLM individual he would shoot. I do not feel that Melvin constitutes a threat to my well-being, because Melvin has threatened me every other year for the past five years. However, I believe it is important to document his attitude towards bighorn sheep."

The ubiquitous nature of such threats was depicted in an August 1980 letter to the paper, from the wife of a federal mine safety inspector:

"From the time of our arrival here, we have been under constant harassment... We have been ordered to stay at home by the local law enforcement agen-

cy... so they could better protect us against the threats that were made upon us. We check our cars daily for bombs, have listened to phone calls of every nature (even to family death threats). Our children have been called everything in the book, harassed and intimidated both at school and socially because of the position held by their father..."

This was jihad. A struggle not merely political and economic, but religious, moral, ideological. At its center was a philosophical question: Who really owns the public lands of the West? Do they belong to the residents of the nearest small town? Do they belong to the federal land managing agencies? Do they belong to Peabody Coal, Exxon, Tenneco, Sohio? Or do they -- incredible as it might seem -- actually belong to the American public?

By 1979, the conflict had earned itself a name -- the "Sagebrush Rebellion." Ostensibly a campaign for legislation to transfer ownership of federal lands to the states, its real object was less quixotic: to defeat FLPMA -- and, at all cost, to stop the BLM's wilderness inventory in its tracks.

"The focus of that movement was, of course, to restore federally owned lands to the state of Utah, but I repeatedly said that was a very unlikely event," Utah Senator Orrin Hatch told me in 1983. The real purpose of the Sagebrush Rebellion, Hatch explained, "was to put pressure on. And it worked. It got national attention, and it did cause some of the most reprehensible overseers of Utah lands to back up and look at themselves and even caused some of them to be transferred."

At the time, sitting there in the senator's palatial Washington, D.C., office, I wondered just who were the "reprehensible overseers" who had been deported from Utah. Four years later, flipping through back issues of the *Moab Times-Independent*, I discovered the answer.

Carter/Andrus Sell-out

By the summer of 1979, the Sagebrush Rebellion had become a national cause. Two

state legislatures had passed Sagebrush Rebellion legislation, and a parade of politicians, including congressmen, governors and presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, were bragging that they, too, were "sagebrush rebels."

Back in Washington, D.C., the Carter administration was running scared. Carter's environmental agenda, once wildly idealistic, had created harsh political reactions. His "hit list" against federally funded water projects, for example, had, in the words of Carter's Secretary of Interior Cecil Andrus, "put together a coalition that beat us." Hamstrung by OPEC, inflation and the hostages in Iran, Jimmy Carter had begun his retreat. By 1979, the Carter environmental agenda was experiencing a sea change.

"I would go in to lobby with Rupe Cutler, the assistant secretary of agriculture," recalls Dave Foreman, then a top lobbyist for The Wilderness Society. "Rupe had been assistant executive director of The Wilderness Society at one time. And I'd get the argument from him, 'well, the President's in trouble in the West -- this senator, that senator -- you've got to back off...' And we'd come out having made all the compromises and having been lobbied."

The last thing Jimmy Carter needed, with Ronald Reagan breathing deregulatory fire, was the bad political press emanating from southern Utah.

In August 1979, BLM's Utah state director retired. His replacement, Gary Wicks -- handpicked by Andrus -- was a man with a mission. Ten days after taking office, Wicks was barnstorming across southern Utah, preaching the gospel of the Sagebrush Rebellion to the converted. "Unlike some, I don't believe that the policies and the laws are immutable," Wicks told an astonished Moab Chamber of Commerce. "I believe that state and local governments ought to have some important say over the kinds of decisions that affect their lives."

"Wicks went on to say," reported the *Moab Times-Independent*, "that he dis-

Urban West...

(Continued from page 15)

est scenery and those most remote from a good-sized city are not doing as well.

The relentless growth of the metropolitan centers -- Denver, Salt Lake City, Phoenix and especially California -- cannot be overlooked. California gains more new people every year than Wyoming has. This tends to push people out in concentric waves, spawning growth in satellite cities hundreds of miles away.

Most of the people flooding into Arizona, for example, come from California, not the frost belt. Ultimately, even the farthest corners of the rural West are bound to be affected.

Unlike many developed nations, the United States is still expanding rapidly, adding more than 2 million people a year (1 million in the Western states). This growth is due partly to a high birth rate, the "echo" of the 1950s baby boom, and partly to heavy immigration. The United States takes in about two-thirds of the world's immigrants, who

account for between one-third and one-half of our annual population increase (depending on which estimates you use for illegal immigration).

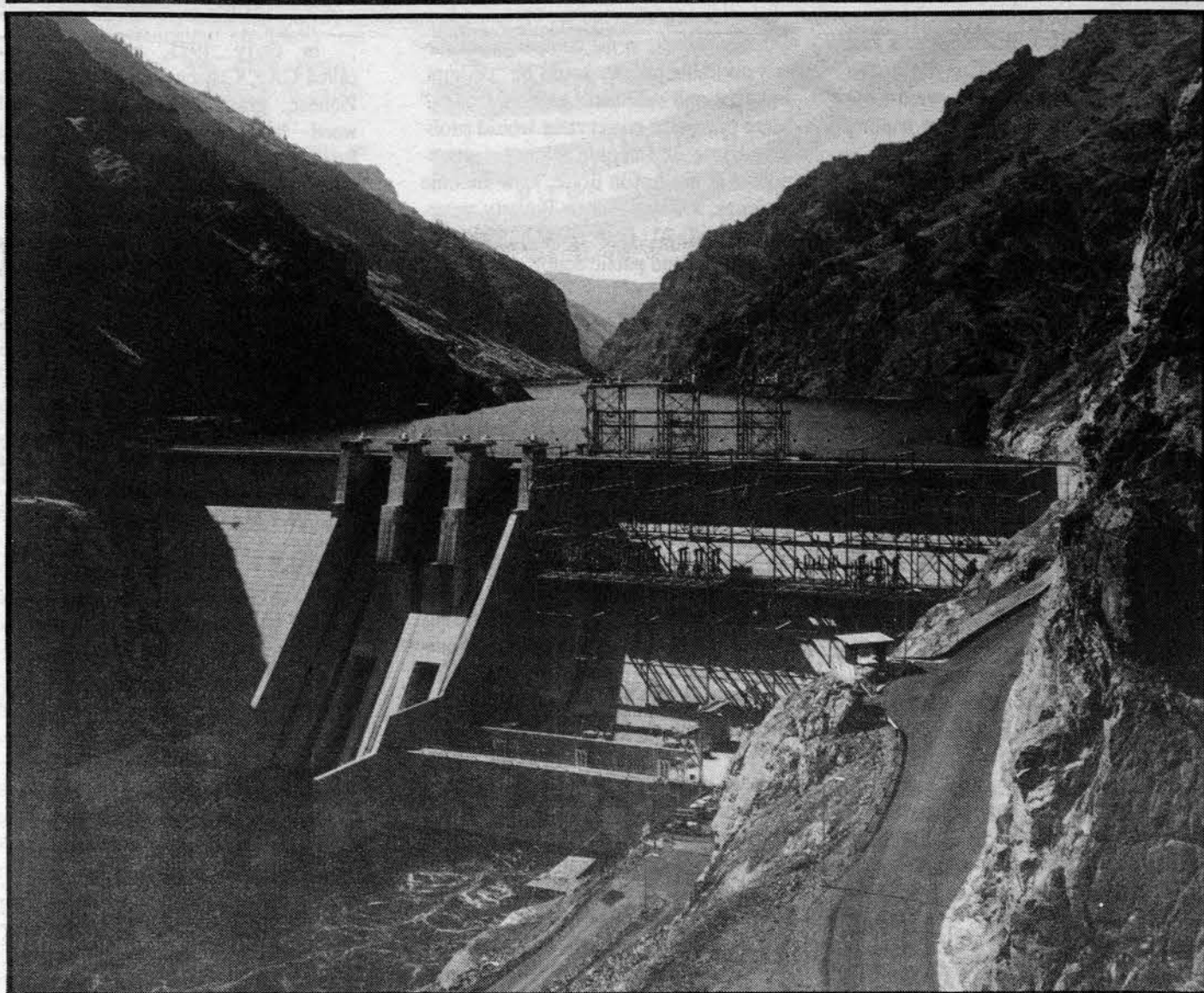
While the Rocky Mountain states get very little of that foreign immigration, they lead the country in the rate of natural increase. The Mormon domain of Utah and parts of adjacent states have a fertility rate (children born per woman) higher than any other part of the nation.

Humans are the only creatures for whom constant population growth is regarded as "normal." Other animals' numbers may wax and wane but in the long run are normally stable. Not so with mankind, whose numbers have grown geometrically, increasing by increasing amounts, for as long as we know.

Someday, of course, we will have to learn how to get along with a stable population and a stable economy, since neither can expand forever. Perhaps the current Rocky Mountain experience will give us some practice in that endeavor.

□

(Continued on page 22)



Idaho Power Co.

Hell's Canyon Dam

During the boom, Idaho succumbed to good sense

Lest you think that the entire West succumbed to the the hypnotic beat of boom, boom, boom, here is an account of how the conservative state of Idaho behaved conservatively -- resisting the lure of a coal-fired power plant that was to carry the state to the land of milk and honey.

by Pat Ford

Six months ago, Idaho's richest man stepped confidently into a time machine.

Potato king J.R. Simplot announced that one of his companies would build a string of coal-fired power plants along the Snake River -- two 1000-megawatt plants a year, for year after year after year.

Fourteen years dissolve ...

... It is 1974, and 2000 megawatts a year is roughly the official construction schedule of Northwest and Northern Rockies electric companies. Big coal and nuclear plants are rising or about to rise in every neighboring state -- Colstrip in Montana, the Craig trio in Colorado, several each in Wyoming and Utah, Valmy in Nevada, Boardman and Trojan in Oregon, and, in Washington, the flagship, the five-plant WPPSS nuclear complex. And these are only the first wave.

Idaho is poised for its usual role -- follower. Idaho Power Company announces it will build a 1000-megawatt coal plant, called Pioneer, near the Snake River south of Boise.

Idaho's business, agricultural and political establishments embrace Pioneer; conservationists and low-income advocates violently attack it. Wall Street stands ready to float the bond offerings.

The Simplot proposal, however,

draws neither embrace nor attack -- only silence. For it is 1988 and Pioneer was never built. Idaho, the only state without a commercial coal or nuclear plant, enjoys the lowest electric rates in the nation and has a surplus of electricity into the next century. Its establishments no longer speak with one voice on energy, its citizen groups have real threats to occupy them, and Wall Street is otherwise engaged.

Yoked to the past, Simplot says that rejecting Pioneer was "the biggest fool thing that anybody ever done for the state of Idaho." Strike "fool" and you are nearer the verdict of events.

Idaho Power's public relations name for its coal plant has become, 14 years later, a fitting name for the broader story, an economic and environmental success story in which Pioneer's foes did the pioneering.

How Idaho's people said no to Pioneer is half of a vivid tale of grassroots democracy. The other half is something we don't much believe in -- wise and courageous government. Beginning 14 years ago, the Idaho Public Utilities Commission foresaw the future and chose to lead rather than follow.

The Snake River's crescent fall across southern Idaho is a magnetic field, gathering land and water, people, settlement, development and power. Three-fourths of Idaho's people, three-fourths

of its largest economy, all but one of its biggest industrial plants and employers, and its dominant religion and politics are all on the Snake River Plain.

This creation has a mantra: "The Snake is a working river." Had Faraday never wired the dynamo, the Snake would still have been worked. But the marriage in our century of electricity to the river's own current makes the landscape and economy of southern Idaho what they are.

In 1901, Idaho Power Company's corporate parent built Swan Falls Dam in the Snake River canyon south of Boise. Stand within its old stone powerhouse, hear and feel the intimate throb of its horse-sized turbines just steps away, and you can grasp, at the human scale, the elegance and craft of hydroelectric generation in a way the giant dams won't allow. You can understand the growth of skills and pride in generating power from this river, and how they could lead -- as bigger dams produced ten, twenty, then eighty times what Swan Falls can -- to skills and pride in wielding power over this state.

Idaho Power built dams on the Snake River -- 16 of them along 465 miles -- for 65 years. Most of that hydropower was on the cost curve of computers today. Economies of scale, relatively stable costs, and free fuel made the electricity cheaper with each new dam.

By 1969, that system produced a kilowatt-hour for less than half a cent. Idaho homes and businesses joined their Northwest neighbors, similarly blessed with Columbia River hydro, in the highest per capita electricity use in the world. Energy-intensive industry was lured by the low rates; three phosphate processing plants near Pocatello used up to 30 percent of Idaho Power's total supply.

But farming was the pivot of hydro's sweep. Irrigated agriculture has dominat-

ed Idaho since the 1890s, when, in Idaho writer Ed Chaney's words, "pioneer alchemists first created gold by mixing desert soils with water." That was Snake Plain soil and Snake River water. Idaho Power's dams generated energy, but they also strung irrigation reservoirs across arid southern Idaho.

After World War II, a Rupert farmer drilled the first deep irrigation well into the Snake River Aquifer, lifting the water with an electric pump. Fifteen years later, a Nampa farmer first used electric pumps in series to high-lift water from the Snake canyon several hundred feet to dry benchlands above. Soon, almost every farm -- whether it used reservoir, aquifer or flowing river water -- had electric sprinkler systems spraying the fields.

Farming and hydro on the Snake River exploded for 25 years. The green fields once found only near the river and canals now shot miles into the desert. In 1949, 1900 pumps watered 132,000 acres. By 1975, 14,000 pumps watered 1.6 million acres. A million acres of sagebrush and range had become cropland. The summer-only electricity involved was enough to supply every home in Idaho, and then some. It was cheap, and it got cheaper the more a farmer used.

Early in this surge, in the 1950s, Idaho Power took on the federal government and Northwest public power for the biggest prize on the Snake: dam-building rights in Hells Canyon. (Those opposed to any dams, no matter who built them, were a weaker third voice.)

Persuaded that a federal dam could threaten state-granted water rights, Idaho agriculture, and with it the Republican Party from Gov. Len Jordan down, swung to the company's side. Republicans won the White House in 1952, and soon after Idaho Power had a federal license for three Hells Canyon dams. Built over 15 years, they generated almost 1000 megawatts at four-tenths of a cent per kilowatt-hour, doubling the company's size and making it the largest all-hydro utility in the nation.

Hells Canyon symbolizes Idaho's postwar economic burst and the political ligature among its parts. Agriculture, industry, population, commerce -- growth in any served all, with electric energy seeding and lubricating the whole. Save for the LDS Church, Idaho Power was the most powerful institution in the state.

That is how they came at Pioneer -- "like they came at everything, like Idaho was named for Idaho Power."

When Bob Lenaghen -- the words are his -- arrived at the Idaho Public Utilities Commission in 1973, its meager staff was under orders not to audit any utilities. There had been one exception. In the late 1960s, another new commissioner looking for an apartment in Boise stumbled upon an Inter-mountain Gas Company "guest house," stocked with liquor and occasionally women for important customers and contacts. An audit found it on company books under name LIDO. Gas customers had been paying for it for years.

"That's how the PUC ran in those days," Lenaghen says. "All the utilities were used to getting their way. I broke the back of that."

He was perfect for the job. Bob Lenaghen is stocky, solid, gruff, gravel-voiced -- a tough man. Born and raised near Boise, he was working at a Boise store after WWII when a retail clerks and meatpackers union local got started. He was picked to lead it, and 20 years

(Continued on page 20)

Good sense...

(Continued from page 21)

mission found the need would exist by 1982 or 1983. (This was the change from Ward's draft, which admitted no such need.) Pioneer was then denied because of potential "impact on air quality and human health ... in the state's most populous and fastest-growing region." Shurtliff's insistent need-cost equation was put off a bit and left explicitly unresolved. But Pioneer was dead.

It would take another story as long again to record the echoes and aftershocks, some of which are rumbling yet. What follows is a bare and partial summary.

Idaho Power struck back where it could. When a drained Karl Shurtliff left the PUC three months after Pioneer, Andrus' replacement, Matt Mullaney, was promptly rejected by the 1977 Legislature. (The company couldn't get at their real target yet; Lenaghan's term didn't end until 1979.) The Legislature also directed the PUC to study alternative sites for a coal plant and choose one -- what Ward calls the "build anything, build anywhere, but build" order.

But Idaho Power missed a big one that same session. Days after appointing Mullaney, Cecil Andrus left for Washington, D.C., and four years as Jimmy Carter's Secretary of Interior. New Gov. John Evans wavered for six weeks, then bowed to Lenaghan's insistence and appointed Conley Ward to the PUC. On the session's next-to-last day, three Republican senators crossed Idaho Power and their caucus, and Ward was confirmed 18-17.

Three months later, the company reapplied for a coal plant, this time at one of three isolated sites in southcentral Idaho. Opponents called it Son of Pioneer, and a smaller version of the same battle began. Peavey charged back in, new foes sprang up near each site, business and ag leaders rallied in support, public meetings and PUC hearings resumed. At one site, a company air monitoring tower was acetylened to the ground.

But Ward and Lenaghan moved crisply out on a course of their own. Call it Ward's vision, Lenaghan's will and their common populism. In the next two years they turned Idaho utility regulation inside out.

Lenaghan completed his expansion and spinal transfusion of the PUC staff, making it the most talented assemblage in Idaho government. They essentially ignored the Legislature's find-a-coal-plant order. Working through the rate cases each utility was filing, so fast there would at times be three from one company in various stages, they ended promotional rates and mandated a clutch of conservation programs.

Big irrigators and businesses, big all-electric homeowners -- all hooked on the old "use more, pay less" rates -- and of course the utilities, howled and fought. "For awhile there, it seemed like every Legislature was a PUC lynch mob," says Ward. "They made it about as hot as it can be in public life." Legislation reversed PUC actions (for instance, inverted rates -- use more, pay more per unit -- were banned). The utilities appealed every PUC decision, and the Idaho Supreme Court reversed many.

In mid-1978, Idaho Power withdrew Son of Pioneer to avoid the rejection they saw coming. The PUC instead approved a few least-risk projects, like hydro upgrades and shares in joint ven-

tures. Gradually growth rates came down, to 5, then 3 percent. Conservation took hold as rates rose.

When the recession hit in 1979, growth essentially ended. Beginning that same year, the PUC used a new federal law, the Public Utilities Regulatory Policy Act, to start building a robust non-utility electric generation industry in Idaho. Today small hydro and cogeneration are able to supply any new in-state power needs through the century's end.

The PUC's goal was to bring the hydro base through the thermal plant binge sweeping the West in those years. The state's electric rates today are proof of their success.

John Peavey also made a modest post-Pioneer contribution. Since 1975, he had wanted a more direct solution to the core problem of which Pioneer was a symptom: draining the Snake River for new irrigation. Spurred by his defeat at Idaho Power's hands, Matt Mullaney began excavating hydro law for Peavey.

Each Idaho Power dam had an attached water right to use a certain level of flow. But these rights were expressly "subordinated" -- the state could allow future upstream diversions, even if they diminished the water rights at the dams. This subordination language reflected agriculture's pre-eminence in Idaho water law; it was routine in every hydro water right.

But Mullaney discovered that Idaho Power's oldest water right, at Swan Falls Dam, had quite accidentally never been subordinated. It was for 8400 cubic feet per second of Snake River flow, but 70 subsequent years of irrigation diversions had reduced actual flow at Swan Falls to some 6000 cfs. 2400 cfs was out irrigating farm fields, illegally, instead of generating power in the river.

In August 1977, Peavey, Mullaney and 30 friends filed a petition with the PUC asking that all the hydro system's lost potential, from failure to defend the Swan Falls right, be removed from Idaho Power's rate base and refunds made to customers. The wedge to break

the Idaho Power-agriculture alliance was driven.

The issue was soon in court, but not before the PUC ordered a moratorium on new irrigation hookups. Idaho Power's potential financial exposure forced it to begin defending that part of its water right still intact -- forced it to begin resisting new diversions from the river. Gradually, its forced defense became a willing defense, as it realized that protecting the hydro base was good business. Gradually, though the company never quite said it this way, Idaho Power realized John Peavey was right. They became allies against new diversions, and in 1984 joined to enact legislation severely limiting future consumptive withdrawals from the Snake.

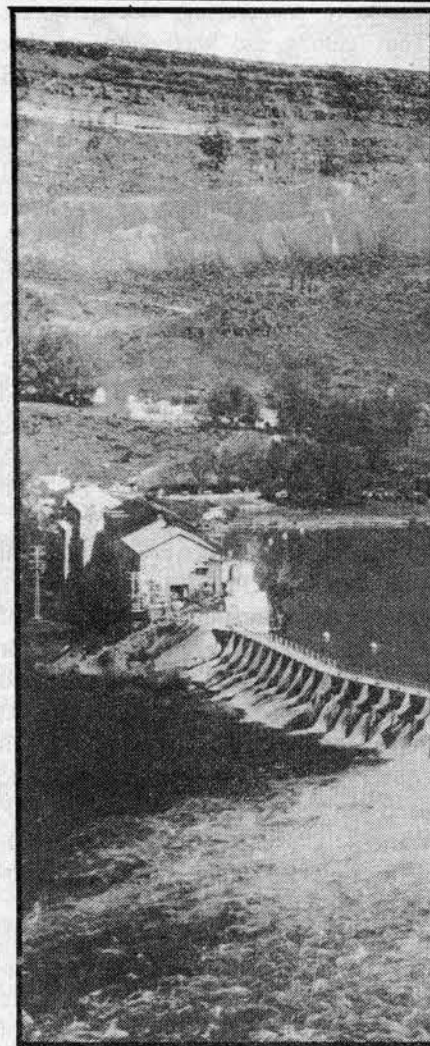
Bob Lenaghan knew he would be a one-term commissioner from the day Pioneer was decided. In the 2 1/2 years left him he took most of the heat, out on point, for the great and greatly misunderstood service he and Ward were rendering their state.

In 1979 he was rejected for a second term on a party line vote. It gained Idaho Power little but revenge. It did not slow the achievement the PUC was building, guided now by Ward, who was in turn guided by his friend's example: "Bob told me, and showed me, that 'you can do anything in this job you are big enough to do.'"

Today, Lenaghan works mornings for Cecil Andrus and plays some golf in the afternoons. Last year, he was at a little meeting which Jim Bruce, now retired from Idaho Power, also attended. As talk ranged off the main point, Bruce told the group that if it wasn't for Bob Lenaghan shutting off Pioneer, his company would surely have landed sooner or later in financial trouble.

Lenaghan's growl can be unexpectedly cheerful: "That made me feel pretty good!"

Ten years after the Pioneer proposal, Boise was still experiencing serious



Swan Falls Dam

inversions. During one, the same gray murky cloud hung over Boise for 22 straight days. Most of those days the sun was shining on the mountains just north of town. In town, you couldn't see the mountains, you could barely see the town, but you could clearly see the air. Children and old folks, among others, stayed indoors. The city council voted itself authority to prohibit wood stove use and invoked it several times that winter and this past one.

From my home in Boise last winter, I talked long-distance with Bill Smallwood. "Can you imagine," he asked me, "what you'd have there today if they'd built Pioneer?"

□

Boom!...

(Continued from page 18)

likes confrontations and feels that alternatives can be worked out through cooperation between the BLM and local residents. "My basic approach to the job," Wicks said, "is to eliminate as much as possible the criticism people have of the BLM, in Utah."

The significance of Wicks' visit was clear: The Sagebrush Rebels' strategy had worked. Violence talked -- and the politicians had walked. "It's really kind of an exciting time to be living in the rural West," cheered editor Sam Taylor in an accompanying editorial. "A whole lot is going to be happening in the next few years to determine how vast amounts of public domain are going to be used in the future. There is little question in my mind that the rules, as now defined, are going to have to be changed."

Indeed, the rules were changing faster than the Sagebrush Rebels had ever dreamed. On Oct. 25, 1979, Moab residents opened the Moab *Times-Independent* to a piece of astonishing news. Sen. Hatch said that the war for Negro Bill Canyon was over. BLM State Director Gary Wicks had told him that "District Manager S. Gene Day had been instructed to resolve the dispute."

By November 1980, when the BLM announced its final wilderness inventory decisions, the meaning of Wicks' remark was made

plain. Negro Bill Canyon had been dropped from the wilderness inventory. Along with it, one and a quarter million acres of pristine wilderness -- a land area greater than that of all seven national parks in Utah and Colorado combined -- had also been cut from the Moab District's wilderness inventory.

In all, 42 roadless areas had been wiped off the district's wilderness study map. Nearly half of the vanquished roadless areas had been identified as candidates for primitive designation in earlier BLM documents.

On Nov. 17, two BLM wilderness inventory team members appeared before the Grand County Commission to present copies of the agency's final decision on Wilderness Study Areas. Day was nowhere in sight. Team leader Diana Webb (herself a target of conflict of interest charges after routinely filing negative wilderness inventory recommendations on units containing mining claims owned by Cotter Corporation -- her husband's employer) made a speech to the commission. Out of 229 roadless areas in the Moab District, Webb announced, BLM had eliminated 200 from the wilderness inventory. In all, nearly 60 percent of the district's roadless lands had been dropped.

The BLM employees had a second announcement: District Manager S. Gene Day would be leaving his post. The commissioners were delighted, but hardly surprised. "It was just a matter of time until Gene Day went down the road," explained Jimmie Walker.

Ten days later, the Negro Bill Canyon lawsuit was settled. According to the terms, the BLM would construct 400 yards of new road up the bed of Negro Bill Canyon. Grand County agreed to maintain the new road.

By Thanksgiving 1980, the commissioners of Grand County must have been near exhaustion from counting their blessings. Their most powerful political allies -- the OPEC nations -- seemed destined to rule the world's economy through the turn of the century, ensuring a brisk domestic market for uranium, oil, natural gas, coal, tar sands and oil shale. All across southern Utah, the multinational energy companies were prowling for buried treasure, opening up offices, buying mining claims, building new roads, constructing new milling plants and buying equipment.

The sole threat to this economic utopia -- the wilderness inventory, which had thrown countless roadblocks in the path of exploration and development -- had been resoundingly defeated, and along with it, the hubris of the federal land management agencies. Never again would the American government attempt to wrest control of those lands from the rightful owners -- local government, the local business establishment and the multinational energy companies.

This was it. This was the Big Bang. This was the boom to end all booms.

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This is the first of a four-part series.