



January 16, 2009

## Two Cents Worth: Through the back door..

If you have ever doubted the back door politics that take place in America and/or are not fond of wilderness designations that having little, if anything, to do with the true definitions of 'wilderness,' you'll be interested in the following editorial entitled 'It will be nice for them to know...Pork-filled 'wilderness' bill gets Senate approval' and posted by the Las Vegas Review-Journal on Wednesday.

Essentially, it decries Nevada Senator Harry Reid using a rare procedural move to gain ground on Senate approval of a 1,300-page lands bill that, among other things, places an additional two million acres in nine states "off limits for any productive economic use by labeling them "wilderness" and/or declaring new and additional rivers to be wild and scenic."

Via a Sunday procedural vote, the LVRJ says, Reid and his cronies took a big step toward backdooring the West by approving the measure 66-12--well beyond the 59 votes needed to bring the measure to a formal vote, perhaps even by today (Friday).

Oklahoma Senator Tom Coburn, who at least questioned the earmark spending in the bill, reportedly said, "Everybody holds their nose" and votes for it because so many have individual projects they want to see passed in their states.

Now you why those wilderness advocates who live nowhere near the land they want to lock up, are so smug--because they are convinced that in the long run, they have enough juice to get most, if not all, of what they want regardless of what you think.

And, of course, far be it from our esteemed Senators to stand in the way of what Mike Matz, executive director of the Campaign for America's Wilderness, termed "a most welcome action by many Americans who face so much uncertainty in their lives."

In fairness, I should say that I don't know how approval of the bill would affect local wilderness issues because I haven't seen the document myself. But there can be little doubt that, in the name of pork, the Capitol Hill gang is more than willing to link arms on questionable proposals because of what's in it for each of them--and regardless of the adverse affects those proposals might create for those Americans whose livelihoods are linked to the new 'wilderness' areas, and will either be severely curtailed or disappear altogether in the bargain. So without further ado, here for your own perusal is the LVRJ's editorial, 'It will be nice for them to know...Pork-filled 'wilderness' bill gets Senate approval':

'Calling a rare Sunday procedural vote, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid moved the U.S. Senate closer to passing a 1,300-page lands bill that would allocate \$5 million in federal tax dollars on botanical gardens in Hawaii and Florida and \$3.5 million to celebrate the 450th anniversary of the founding of St. Augustine in 2015--and place an additional two million acres in nine states off limits for any productive economic use by labeling them "wilderness" and/or declaring new and additional rivers to be wild and scenic.

'The legislation--which would allow the state of Alaska to build an airport access road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge--pulls together 150 public lands, parks and water bills in one package. It passed 66-12, well above the 59 votes needed to allow it to proceed to a formal vote later this week.

'The bill advanced over the objections of Senator Tom Coburn, R-OK, who objected to what he

described as questionable priorities and wasteful earmark spending in the package.

'The measure is also opposed by Nevada Republican John Ensign, though he was in Nevada and did not return to Washington for the procedural vote.

"Everybody holds their nose" and votes for it, Senator Coburn said, because so many Senators have individual projects they want to see passed in their states.

'Despite the purportedly unprecedented provision to allow an access road through a wildlife refuge, many conservation groups supported the package as a whole because it had so many provisions to "protect" rivers and designate wilderness.

"It will be a most welcome action by many Americans who face so much uncertainty in their lives," explained Mike Matz, executive director of the Campaign for America's Wilderness.

"It will be nice for them to know they can visit their most treasured spots and see them just as they are. They will be able to continue to hike, hunt, fish, camp, or canoe amid this natural splendor, and that is no small consolation in these difficult times."

'And there you have it.

'Yes, Americans who live so far away they will likely never see the "wilderness" areas in question--all in the Western states, you understand, none throwing anyone out of work in Georgia, Illinois, Connecticut, or Massachusetts--may sleep more cozily now, believing that, far away in the distant West, something nice has been done for the birds and the bunnies.

'But those who actually live in the affected regions may not find it much of a "consolation" to be deprived of gainful employment in any number of resource industries--mining, ranching, lumber--that will now be barred from making any productive use of yet an additional two million acres.

'Such legislation is "necessary for the day-to-day functioning of the Western economy," intoned Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski, the top-ranking Republican on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee, and among the Senate's largest second-generation pork wranglers. Oh, hogwash. To the Americans actually attempting to make their livings on or near the lands in question, "wilderness" is not just about cozier dreams of happy squirrels.

'It's about loss of livelihood as a full- or part-time miner, rancher, sawmill worker, or even mushroom picker--having to go on the government dole rather than feed their families with honest, productive work.'

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