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Two Cents Worth: Interior Sec's order creates de-facto wilderness

'Wild Lands' can be designated by BLM without Congress' consent

If you thought the 2008 battle over wilderness went away, think again. If you thought recent defeat by the Lame Duck Congress of the massive Public Land Omnibus Bill made consideration of additional new wilderness a moot issue, you couldn't be more wrong.

Federal Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has found a way to create "de-facto" wilderness without congressional consent under his own Secretarial Order (No. 3310).

Salazar is being called the "Secretary that would steal Christmas!", as one day before Christmas Eve, he announced that he had signed an Order that seeks to embed a wilderness issue in every component of BLM planning, creating a unique status for wilderness different from other multiple uses in BLM management.

A BLM news release says the Order empowers the BLM "to designate appropriate area with wilderness characteristics under its jurisdiction as "WILD LANDS" and to manage them to protect their wilderness values."

No Forest Reserves involved

This Order does cover only public lands managed by the BLM, as U.S. Service lands fall under the purview of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That being said, Forest Service lands are not involved in this Department of Interior, BLM, public lands process.

A large part of the National Forest Service System went through a similar process over 100 years ago. The Forest Reserves were moved out of the Department of Interior in 1905, when they were put into the Department of Agriculture and were to be managed by a new agency called the Forest Service.

"Transparent" land use planning?

The BLM does add that this designation will be "based on the input of the public and local communities through its existing land management planning process." And, the release continues that all will be handled via "transparent, public land use planning process."

We've already seen examples of just how well the BLM listens to the public on topics such as trail/road management plans, environmental impact statements, etc.; and all Americans should, by now, be well aware of just how little transparency exists under the Obama administration, despite many pledges of openness.

This latest step, by the Interior Secretary, isn't even accompanied by a smoke screen. That tells us just how confident he is that his Order will prove successful come hell or high water.

Salazar openly supported the Public Lands Omnibus Bill which bit the dust in Congress a couple of weeks ago, so the timing of his announcement of Secretarial Order No. 3310 was no accident--coming just after lawmakers had gone home for the holiday. It also was no accident that nobody outside the

arena of wilderness insiders and their media-supported outlets knew it was coming until the last minute.

And, the Blue Ribbon Coalition (a well-known open access to public land advocate) pointed out that it certainly was no accident that the Order ceremony featured Salazar standing right beside people who are well-known wilderness advocates; and that the ceremony took place in the building in Denver recognized as the home of the "virtual altar for wilderness worshippers."

Throughout its own news release, the BLM repeats over and over again that action will include the "public process. But the release also features quote after quote from Department of Interior spokespersons (including Secretary Salazar and BLM Director Bob Abby) pledging to "restore balance and clarity" to the management of public lands.

Coming from a federal agency, does that sound scary or what?

And if the boss at the BLM--with support from the Administration and the Majority Leader--favors designations of "wild lands" under his own proposal, what can the employees be expected to do?

The BLM "manages" 245 million acres in the United States, as well as 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. "The Bureau accomplishes its mission by managing activities such as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands," the announcement reads.

The powers assumed by federal agencies today far exceed what our forefathers saw in the U.S. Constitution. There is no recognized provision for mandating any action, legislating by order, or usurping public rights. Unfortunately, we, the people, have permitted these agencies to grow far too powerful. It's time we change that.

Heller: Create de-facto wilderness

Announcement of the Order drew immediate comment from open use advocates and Nevada Congressman Dean Heller, who said, "This action would allow the Administration to create de-facto wilderness without congressional consent."

Heller continued, "Once again, this Administration is proving that currying favor with extreme environmentalists is more important than responsible land management. This action is a blatant attempt by this Administration to circumvent Congress and create de-facto wilderness,"

It certainly does create the question: If a portion of land is truly deserving of wilderness designation, why is this Administration afraid to engage Congress?

Remember when Lyon and Mineral Counties teamed up to defeat an attempt led by U.S. Senator Harry Reid to designate somewhere over 500,000 acres of public land as wilderness?

It took public meetings at which over 250 turned out in neighboring Hawthorne, and over 650 in Smith Valley, to lay that proposal to rest. Even then, wilderness advocates--the big boys, not the local people--said they would not give up the fight and Senator Reid's reps simply called for more public input. How much more did they need?

Wovoka area is not BLM land

Lest you believe I am totally opposed to wilderness, let me tell you again, that is not true. If an area truly possesses wilderness characteristics, and public use interests can be addressed, I fully support wilderness. Such may be the case with the locally-proposed Wovoka Wilderness Area of around 80,000 acres.

Local supporters had at least a chance of gaining approval via continuing negotiations until those same "big boys" over-reached for the pie-in-the-sky area and ran right over the locals in the process.

I could definitely not support some half-baked theft of 500,000 acres of public land by the federal government under the guise of wilderness characteristics like six-inch high sage brush running for miles and miles of flat land.

Secretarial Order 3310 smacks obviously of just another administration effort to sidestep the real issues of those open access people, and then bow down at the altar of those wilderness worshippers as political payback.

One thing is for sure, the battle will heat up again in 2011. But then, everyone can relax because all concerns will be taken into consideration. After all, the feds promise it will be so.

Yup"».

Wolves everywhere?

Yet another example of insanity addressed under the guise of responsible environmentalism:

Last week, the Center for Biological Diversity filed a notice of intent to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if the Service does not create a new nationwide wolf recovery plan.

Charging that the FWS did not respond to an earlier petition, CBD requested that the FWS create a wolf recovery plan for all 48 lower states. Specifically, the request included (1) the Pacific Northwest, including the Olympic and Cascade Mountains, (2) the Great Basin, including portions of California, Nevada and Utah, (3) the southern Rocky Mountains, (4) the northern Rocky Mountains, (5) the Great Plains, (6) the Midwest, and (7) New England.

Isn't that basically the entire USA?

And the FWS has noted that already, "wolves continue to exceed recovery goals and are no longer threatened with extinction."

--Jim Sanford is a longtime Yerington/Mason Valley resident and a former Editor and Publisher of the Mason Valley News. E-mail Jim at sunny091929@aol.com.
