

Idaho Falls Post Register, Thursday, May 2, 2013 – Editorial by Corey Taule (2 pages)

What results from rigidity

For more than a decade, Congressman Mike Simpson has attempted to steer his Boulder-White Clouds wilderness compromise through Congress.

The Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (CEIDRA) remains a model of collaboration. Simpson brought together a number of disparate groups and crafted legislation nobody loved but all could support: Conservationists got 332,775 acres of wilderness, multiple-use advocates received 130,000 acres, ranchers were protected, trails were opened for motorized recreation, and Custer County received a needed infusion of cash.

Simpson, however, hasn't been able to close the deal. Part of the problem is opposition from Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter and Congressman Raul Labrador, who oppose new wilderness, and Sen. James Risch, a former CEIDRA supporter whose defection is crucial because he serves on the committee that would hear the bill.

And yet there's something Otter, Labrador and Risch would dislike even more than passage of CEIDRA: designation of the Boulder-White Clouds as a national monument by President Obama.

Under that scenario, there is no guarantee Idaho's collaborative process would be recognized. Obama could create a White Clouds monument, using powers granted to the president by the Antiquities Act of 1906, and leave Idaho's ranchers, snowmobilers and Custer County on the outside looking in.

"For over a decade, I've said if we don't determine our own destiny in the Boulder-White Clouds, it will be determined for us," Simpson told the Idaho Statesman's Rocky Barker recently.

Could that actually happen? Consider the following:

Barker reported that in the waning days of the Bush administration, Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne seriously considered recommending the White Clouds and Mesa Falls for monument designation. It stands to reason that if a Republican administration considered taking this step, a Democratic regime could do the same.

In 2011, then-Interior Secretary Ken Salazar included the White Clouds on a list of 18 areas in nine states deserving of congressional protection.

Former Idaho Gov. Cecil Andrus has lobbied Obama to create a White Clouds monument. Andrus picked up an important ally in Idaho Conservation League Executive Director Rick Johnson, one of the architects of Simpson's compromise bill. Johnson has grown tired of waiting for Congress. Barker reported that Johnson was in Washington, D.C., recently to lobby for monument designations for the White Clouds and Mesa Falls.

Obama in March created five new monuments. He might not be finished, especially since the last Congress was the first in nearly 30 years that did not create one national park or wilderness area.

There is no guarantee, given the fractured politics in Washington, D.C., that support from Risch, Otter and Labrador would result in passage of CEIDRA. But certainly, Simpson and Sen. Mike Crapo, a longtime CEIDRA supporter, would have a far greater chance of convincing colleagues if Idaho's other leading politicians stood with them.

So it goes. Otter, Labrador and Risch -- all up for re-election in 2014 -- understand it's less perilous in this political atmosphere to appease their tea party base than explain the complexities of compromise.

Their stubbornness, however, should not be forgotten. If CEIDRA continues to stall and Obama pulls the trigger, don't direct your angst at the president or Simpson. Place the blame squarely where it belongs: on this triumvirate of ideologues from our own backyard.

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