

Idaho's federal land debate as it was in 1905

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Photo

I looked back at the writings between Idaho's Republican Senator Weldon Heyburn and President Theodore Roosevelt in 1905 about Idaho's forest reserves to prepare for the covering the Idaho Legislature's Interim Committee on Federal Lands Friday at 9 a.m. at the Capitol.

These two Republicans had clear differences about the value of the reserves and their role in American life. Heyburn saw the reserves as an affront to the state's ability to choose the remaining 50,000 acres the federal government promised it would get under the Admissions Act.

At statehood in 1890, Idaho received federal grants of 3.65 million acres but it took a few years to identify all the lands it wanted. Today the state has 2.46 million acres.

"I am not opposed to creating forest reserves for proper purposes, but I insist that they should be created upon the ground and not upon the maps; that is, from information obtained on the ground, and not by drawing lines upon the map," Heyburn wrote Roosevelt in 2004. "I also submit that they should be created only after full and thorough consultation with those representing the state."

He also saw it has limiting the settlement and growth of the state at a time when homesteaders could get 160 acres by simply clearing it. Roosevelt did not view the people who were claiming the forest lands and selling them to speculators as the same as those making claims in agricultural areas.

“He is not the man who tills the soil, builds the home, and brings permanent prosperity to the region,” Roosevelt said in his letter of June 13, 1905. “This is the man who skins the country and moves on.”

Idaho’s other U.S. Senator, Fred T. DuBois, expressed the views of southern Idaho farm communities who liked the reserves because they protected the flows in the rivers that were their lifeblood. Issues over mining and grazing had already been resolved and ranchers realize that the reserves prevented their grazing lands from being taken over by homesteaders.

“Forest reserves and irrigation go hand in hand, you can not separate one from the other,” DuBois said. “The trouble with my colleague. Senator Heyburn, is, I think, that he is making a fight based upon conditions which do not now exist.”

The biggest problem Heyburn and Idaho Gov. Frank Gooding had with their fellow Republican Roosevelt is they felt his executive decision establishing the forest reserves, now the state’s national forests, was that the outcome of TR’s land review was pre-ordained.

In 1907, Heyburn tried to block Roosevelt from creating new reserves with an amendment on a spending bill that required congressional approval. Before Roosevelt signed the bill he created 16 million acres of new reserves including many in Idaho.

Boise State University political science professor John Freemuth said that’s how he felt when he served on the Idaho Federal Lands Task Force in the late 1990s. He quit when the panel refused to include the national interest in these lands in their proposals.

That’s why he hopes the current interim committee includes a look at the collaborations going on around the state.

“Collaboration is not pre-ordained,” Freemuth said.

Zimo: Leave Idaho's public lands alone

Read more here: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2013/08/08/3136290/zimo-leave-idahos-public-lands.html#storylink=cpy>

Here we go again.

Some Idaho legislators and state officials are meeting to figure out ways to take over our federal public lands. It's a bad idea.

The first session on the grand scheme of transferring federal lands to state management is planned by the Idaho Legislature's Federal Lands Interim Committee from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday, Aug. 9, at the Idaho Capitol, Room East Wing 42, Lower Level, 700 W. Jefferson St. in Boise.

The Interim Committee, which you've got to think is a total waste of taxpayers' money, was established by the Idaho Legislature in April demanding that the federal government "imminently transfer title" to million acres of public lands in Idaho.

There's plenty of opposition to the idea. Idahoans have been consistently concerned that transferring ownership to the state will forever alter public access to outdoor recreational resources. Polling conducted in 2012 showed that 97 percent of Idahoans consider our public lands essential to Idaho's quality of life. That same poll found that 73 percent of Idahoans agreed that one of the things the federal government does well is protect and preserve our national heritage through the management of our forests, parks and other public lands.

What are Idaho legislators and state officials thinking? Can Idaho really afford to manage federal lands? The Legislature can't even fund state parks and drastically cut the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation budget several years ago.

The U.S. Forest Service said it shelled out \$195 million to fight wildfires in Idaho during 2012. Is the state going to foot that bill? What about all that road maintenance on federal lands. Maintaining those roads in Idaho, the ones you and I use for hunting, camping, fishing and ATVing, cost the feds \$7 million last year, according to a Forest Service report. And then there's maintenance of campgrounds and trails and the cost of law enforcement on federal lands.

Will the state will discover that it can't afford to manage federal lands and start selling them to the highest bidder, so that the next time you head to your favorite hunting or fishing spot, it will be posted No Trespassing?

Just say no to Idaho's plan to take over federal public lands. They need to be preserved for generations to come.