

# Guest Opinion: Idaho's land grab is foolishness that needs to go away

By Kahle Becker

June 5, 2015 Updated 9 hours ago

I read the piece in the May 16 Statesman (Labrador: Give state role on feds' turf), regarding Rep.



Raul Labrador's latest federal land transfer legislation, with disappointment. I am a father, hunter, fisherman and small-business owner. I choose to live and raise my family in Idaho because of the wonderful outdoor activities on abundant public lands. I am also former deputy attorney general for the Idaho Department of Lands, the presumptive management agency were Idaho to be successful in its efforts to seize federal lands.

Labrador has bought into the theory that transferring our federal lands to state ownership could avoid federal regulations that protect air, water and wildlife. All this to streamline timber, mining and other projects so big business can profit from land that is every American's birthright. I am not against these

activities, but they must be conducted in such a way as to ensure that we can pass on our outdoor heritage to future generations.

I am also troubled by the rush of some of our state legislators to unlawfully seek title to federal lands. Idaho's Constitution provides that at statehood, Idaho forever disclaimed all right and title to unappropriated public lands. Our state legislators swore an oath to uphold the state and federal constitutions. Our forefathers made a compromise and Idaho was granted entry into the Union. An Oath of Office is a solemn promise to Idaho's citizens. Let's not break promises just so corporations and those with political connections can make a quick buck.

While we still have approximately 2.4 million acres of endowment lands granted at statehood, Idaho has already sold about 1.2 million acres. Studies show that Idaho would be unable to fund the management of these lands. Thus, Idaho would have no choice but to sell them off, and there are efforts underway to streamline the process for the Department of Lands to liquidate this land. It is naive to think this same fate won't befall our federal lands if they are transferred to state ownership.

There are those who argue that Idaho could do a better job in managing these lands. I have experience in seeing the kind of favoritism those with political connections can obtain in influencing Idaho's elected officials. One need look no further than the state's cottage site leasing debacle, wherein the state charged a measly 1.8 percent effective annual land lease rate. A secondary market was created whereby private interests were able to cash in on the value of their state sub-market leases. Then these lessees demanded the state transfer their leased land to

them at the absolute bottom of the real estate market. The state complied and lost some of its most valuable land under circumstances no reasonable businessman would endorse.

Though there was a public auction process to dispose of these lands, despite a law criminalizing interference with state auctions, it was the unspoken rule that the existing lessee would get his lakefront state land and no one else would bid against him. I have little doubt that BLM grazing lessees and timber companies would expect the same preferential treatment if the state land grab were to be successful.

Sportsmen support local, collaborative groups that are changing the paradigm for public land management. We don't support the wholesale transfer of our public lands to the states, and polls show that a vast majority of Westerners don't support this folly. When will our Idaho elected officials start listening to their constituents instead of Utah legislators, corporate donors and D.C. think tanks?

Kahle Becker is an attorney in Boise and on the board of directors of Idaho Wildlife Federation.

Read more here: [http://www.idahostatesman.com/2015/06/05/3836374\\_guest-opinion-idahos-land-grab.html?rh=1#storylink=cpy](http://www.idahostatesman.com/2015/06/05/3836374_guest-opinion-idahos-land-grab.html?rh=1#storylink=cpy)