

Cloud seeding plan brings torrents of criticism

Compiled from Associated Press reports

Gov. Bob Straub's plan to spend \$175,000 to seed Oregon rain clouds has produced more stormy reactions than rain so far.

Saturday, Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus said he opposed cloud seeding programs such as the ones being prepared by both Oregon and Washington.

"I oppose cloud seeding and will not expose the federal government to a potential lawsuit," he said.

Andrus, former Idaho governor, said water artificially drained from clouds over one state could deprive another state of needed precipitation and be the basis for a lawsuit.

Officials in both Idaho and Montana have already threatened legal action to prevent cloud seeding operations. Three cloud seeding experts and the Bonneville Power Administration have also voiced reservations about the effectiveness of such a program.

U.S. Rep. Max Baucus, D-Mont., called cloud seeding plans "extremely dangerous, premature and short-sighted." Baucus said if a cloud seeding bill before the Washington State Legislature passed, he would take action in Congress to stop seeding operations.

Idaho Atty. Gen. Wayne Kidwell urged Straub Wednesday to re-



Drawing by Steve Sandstrom

consider the cloud seeding program, claiming Oregon's program could have "serious ramifications" for Idaho's agricultural production.

Last week Kidwell threatened a lawsuit if the state of Washington went ahead with an appropriation for a cloud seeding project in that state.

A spokesman for Straub said the governor believed Andrus

"was expressing an opinion," and "does not have the power to stop cloud seeding" by any state.

State Rep. Bud Byers, D-Lebanon, who urged Straub last week to begin a cloud seeding program, said he felt Montana and Idaho were bluffing when they threatened lawsuits.

"They don't have a suit. They don't have anything viable to base

their lawsuits on. According to my information there have been no legal cases where weather modification has been viewed with disfavor," he said.

Thursday the Washington State Legislature moved a step closer to beginning a cloud seeding program when the House Appropriations Committee voted to approve \$125,000 for such a program.

Charles Roe, assistant attorney general for Washington State, also discounted efforts by other states to prevent cloud seeding.

"I really don't perceive any problems with it," he said last week shortly after Kidwell telephoned his objections to the Washington State Attorney General.

Even if lawsuits are not brought against Oregon or Washington, the proposed cloud seeding programs may not live up to their expectations.

W. George Slinn, director of Oregon State University's air resources center, cautioned that improper cloud seeding could backfire, resulting in even drier conditions.

"You just can't charge out there and seed the clouds," he said. "If you don't do it right, you'll come out behind as many times as you'll come out ahead."

He explained that releasing too many of the silver iodine crystals used in cloud seeding could cool the water particles in the clouds too much and cause them to remain suspended in the clouds as frozen particles.

Even the company being considered to perform the operation for Oregon, North American Weather

Inc., isn't making any drastic promises.

Company spokesman, Keith Brown, said, "If we had been seeding all this winter — so far — there would still have been very little rain."

He said his company seeded clouds last year for Portland General Electric Co. in the Cascades and the result was only a 15 to 20 per cent increase in the snow-pack.

Washington Gov. Dixy Lee Ray, who has remained cool to cloud seeding proposals, called the project before the Washington Legislature "fraught with many uncertainties" and "a drastic long shot."

Peter Hobbs of the University of Washington, a major backer of the project, said he is concerned the bill "might be talked to death while storms come through without producing much rain."

Hobbs, who holds a doctorate in cloud physics from the University of London, however, conceded, the project was "a longshot" and said "we're running out of time because we are approaching the end of our winter season."

Don Hodel, head of the Bonneville Power Administration, also holds out little hope that a cloud seeding program will noticeably alleviate the Northwest's drought.

"There is probably very little that can be accomplished by cloud seeding," said Hodel. "We haven't done it for several years, but when we did it, its impact seemed to be quite marginal... maybe a five to ten per cent increase of rain in the (Columbia) basin where cloud seeding was done."

Reforesters can't weather arid climate

Even though Sunday's brief showers helped some, area reforestation projects are taking a beating from the dry weather and two major private timber landowners have been forced to suspend some tree planting operations.

Officials from Weyerhaeuser Co. report the dryness of southeast slopes has forced the company to suspend planting seedlings on those hillsides and a Georgia Pacific Corp. spokesman reports that company has sus-

pending tree planting operations for the season.

Although the Willamette National Forest is going ahead with most of its scheduled planting of 4 million trees, silviculturalist Ralph Jaskowski says "we could lose our shirt" if significant rainfall doesn't come soon. He said some 4,000 acres of seedlings planted last fall are in jeopardy because of drying winds and freezing weather.

The Eugene District of the Bureau of Land

Management also suspended tree plantings for a time during February but resumed them when moist weather made conditions more favorable.

Seedlings used for reforestation are grown in outdoor nurseries and then transplanted to forest slopes. The transplanting must be completed no later than March 15, before the roots of the dormant trees begin to grow, according to reforestation specialist Brian Cleary.

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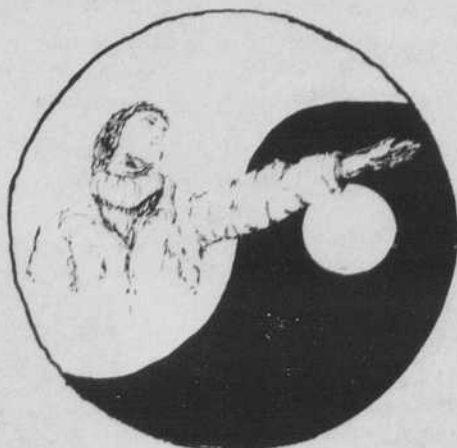
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