

Bird range uses fought

Timber covets
Snake River
bird reserve

By RICHARD WAGONER
Of the Emerald

One of the world's densest populations of birds of prey could be lost if Congress reverses an executive order that set aside some 400,000 acres of wild lands in Idaho's Snake River Canyon.

That's the warning Mark Hilliard of the Bureau of Land Management brought to the University Thursday during a presentation about the Birds of Prey Natural Area.

The area was set aside by former interior secretary Cecil Andrus to protect scarce and endangered predatory birds that nest on the steep canyon cliffs during the spring and summer.

The canyon and desert plains stretching north and south are the home and feeding grounds of dense populations of peregrine falcons, owls, golden eagles, osprey and a variety of hawks, Hilliard said.

Hilliard, who brought to the presentation a prairie falcon taken from the area, said about 600 pairs of birds representing 15 species nest in the area. Some of the nests are only 200 to 300 yards apart, he said.

The reserve is in danger of being reduced by Sen. James McClure, R-Idaho, who plans to hold hearings later this year to discuss cutting its acreage for timber harvest.

But Hilliard, who has been researching predatory birds in the area since it was set aside, claims a reduction in acreage could spell disaster for the creatures that nest there.

The natural area, located in southwestern Idaho, was first

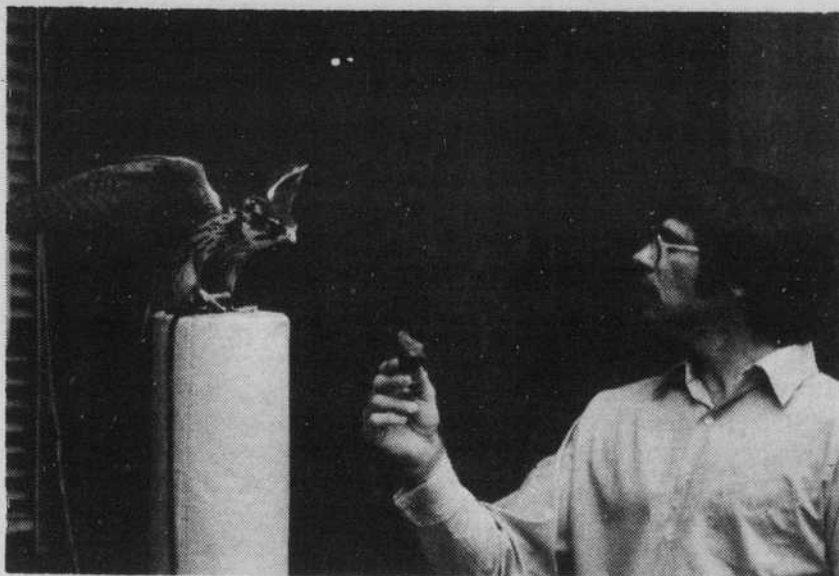


Photo by Steve Dykes

An Idaho prairie falcon named Tawny receives meat from Mark Hilliard of the BLM. Hilliard brought the bird as part of a presentation on the Birds of Prey Natural Area.

established in 1971 as a small strip along the river. But research indicated that many of the birds were flying as far as 16 miles north of the river to prey on the Townsend ground squirrels that thrive there.

After three congressional bills to increase the size of the area died in the lame duck session last year, Andrus expanded the restricted area by executive withdrawal, Hilliard said.

The withdrawal protects the raptors' and squirrels' habitat from agricultural encroachment on the plains, and will protect the area for 20 years unless Congress decides to overturn it.

"This land is highly sought for agriculture — monoculture irrigated agriculture," Hilliard said. "But this amount of land is necessary to provide prey so that in lean years — drought years — (the birds) can recover."

BLM now proposes to make the canyon and feeding grounds a national conservation area, which would require an act of Congress.

"The national conservation proposal won't lock up the

land," Hilliard said. "It allows for multiple-use activities."

Current area use includes hydropower generation, livestock grazing, small-scale oil and gas drilling, geothermal development, recreation and even military maneuvers.

All of these uses are compatible with the birds of prey, Hilliard said, and in some cases — such as with military war games — even improve the birds' habitat.

Hilliard said tanks and other heavy equipment operating on the plains churn up the soil, promoting the growth of grass. The grass is prime habitat for the ground squirrels, and more ground squirrels mean more food for the birds, he said.

The national conservation proposal would not lock out the current uses of the river area, Hilliard said. It would only prevent agriculture and other uses that could damage the squirrels' habitat.

"These birds of prey are a resource that can't be found anywhere else," he said. "Once they are gone they can't be replaced."

FBI arrests former Oregon official

PORTLAND (AP) — A former Oregon Democratic National Committee member was arrested in Washington on two felony warrants from Tillamook County and Portland, an FBI agent said here Saturday.

Franklin P. Lamb, 37, was arrested at his home Friday, said Robert H. Gast, head of the Portland FBI office.

The agent said the Tillamook warrant charged Lamb with the burglary of a house near Pacific City several months ago. The warrant said Lamb took several personal items, including some letters.

Tillamook County District At-

torney Robert Wasson said Lamb was part owner of the house, but a Lincoln City policeman was living in it at the time.

The Portland warrant accused Lamb of leaving the state to avoid prosecution.

Lamb currently works as assistant counsel to the crime subcommittee of the U.S. House Judiciary Committee.

He appeared in a Washington federal court Friday and was ordered to appear in U.S. District Court in Portland April 24.

The former Portland committee member also was indicted in Multnomah County in February

with three counts of making telephone calls and charging them to other numbers.

Last October, he was convicted of stealing a socket and sawblade from a Portland department store.

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