

Log export ban clears congressional panel

WASHINGTON (AP) — Legislation to bolster domestic timber supplies by banning the export of unprocessed logs from most state-owned lands in the West cleared a congressional panel Monday.

Pacific Northwest lawmakers drafted the measure to offset logging bans that have been imposed on an increasing amount of public land to protect the rare northern spotted owl and other wildlife in old-growth forests.

Now that it has been approved by a House-Senate conference committee, the measure is expected to clear the full House and Senate as early as this week.

Under the bill, export of raw logs from one-fourth of the state-owned lands in Washington could continue but would be banned from all state lands in Oregon, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico.

The conference committee version actually applies west of the 100th meridian, covering part of the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, but there is little commercial logging in those states.

The measure, included in the 1990 Customs and Trade

Act, exempts Alaska and Hawaii from the state and federal bans. It also allows the president and individual states to rescind the ban if it is determined it is not in the state or nation's best economic interest.

Backers of the proposal say it will save for domestic markets about 600 million board feet of timber a year from being sent to higher bidders overseas. Of the total, about 350 million board feet comes from Washington and about 100 million board feet from Oregon.

In each of the last two years, about 3.6 billion board feet of unprocessed timber has been exported from the two states, about 80 percent of the nation's total. About one in four trees cut in the Pacific Northwest is shipped overseas, principally to Japan.

"When we are experiencing a tight timber supply, as we are now in the Northwest, it makes absolutely no sense to be shipping raw logs overseas," said Sen. Bob Packwood, R-Ore.

"Oregon mills need the logs and our workers need the jobs," he said. "Once the House and Senate approve this agreement, I will actively encourage the president to sign this bill."

Court ruling does not stop peyote use

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A U.S. Supreme Court ruling that states can prohibit the taking of illegal drugs, even as part of a religious ceremony, hasn't stopped many Indians in Utah and elsewhere from using peyote, officials say.

"The Navajo Nation will not accept the U.S. Supreme Court decision," said LeNora Begay, press officer for the tribe whose reservation sprawls across southeastern Utah, New Mexico and Arizona.

"The Navajo Nation will not prosecute anyone for using peyote as a sacrament in their religious ceremonies," she said.

The high court's April 17 decision held that states and the federal government have the right to ban use of controlled substances such as marijuana and peyote, a hallucinogen, in religious services.

That landmark ruling involved the case of two people who were fired from an Oregon drug rehabilitation center because they used peyote in rites. The Oregon courts determined peyote use was not a constitutionally protected right, and the U.S. Supreme Court agreed.

However, other religious organizations, including the Roman Catholic Church, have expressed concern that the ruling empowers states to control religious practices and that governments could use it to prohibit certain religions.

Among those most directly

affected are members of the Native American Church, which includes among its practices a peyote ceremony. Church members in Utah say they continue to practice their religion, including peyote ceremonies, without interruption from state or federal authorities and with the blessing of the Navajo Nation.

"Within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation we do not limit anyone from practicing their religion," said Begay. "As long as they are on the reservation, we will preserve their right to practice their religion."

An estimated 25,000 members of the Native American Church live on the Navajo Reservation.

Begay emphasized that the U.S. Supreme Court decision gave authority to the states to determine whether illegal drugs could be used in religious ceremonies.

Arizona has told tribal officials it will not prosecute those who ingest peyote on the reservation. Begay would like to see Utah make a similar promise.

"Religion vs. government is a sensitive issue," said state narcotics Lt. Dave Fullmer. "As a state, we are not going to address the problem on the reservations. That's a federal problem."

State officers have no jurisdiction over tribal lands, but if members of the Native American Church practice the ritual

off the reservation, "then that's a different ball game," Fullmer said.

So far, peyote rituals have been restricted to the reservations.

"Essentially, the Indians have been given a considerable amount of sovereignty to run their own affairs," said U.S. Attorney for Utah Dee Benson. He said no one has complained to his office about illegal drug use on the reservation.

"The court has been clear that where there are laws prohibiting illegal use of peyote that Indians or anyone else cannot use it," he said. "And peyote is included among the controlled substances and drugs."

Benson said he would have to think long and hard about whether to pursue any complaints or investigations into peyote use on the reservation, but he added that drug abuse and trafficking is at the top of the Justice Department's priorities.

Critics of the peyote ritual point out that peyote was part of Native American ritual only in northern Mexico and western Texas, where the peyote plants are found.

But the Native American Church, which incorporates members of all Indian tribes across the nation, has a peyote ritual practiced according to local Native American traditions.



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