

Committee to decide fate of owls or 3,000 jobs



PORTLAND (AP) — A Cabinet-level committee intended to be an escape valve for the Endangered Species Act will decide soon whether to save 3,000 timber jobs rather than preserve flyways for the threatened northern spotted owl.

Three weeks of expert testimony and intense cross-examination on the issue ended in Portland last week.

Sometime in March or April, the committee, popularly known as the "God Squad," will review the mountains of evidence and decide whether to grant what would be the first-ever exemption to the 19-year-old Endangered Species Act.

It is part of a larger battle over whether to preserve the Northwest's old-growth forests. Specifically, the Endangered Species Committee will decide whether to allow the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to sell timber on 44 tracts of federal land scattered over 4,500 acres in Western Oregon.

BLM Director Cy Jamison sought to exempt the sales from the Endangered Species Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had used the act to stop the sales on grounds they would destroy spotted owl dispersal habitat — forests that allow them to hide from predators such as goshawks and great horned owls while flying to new nesting areas.

Mark Rutzick, a lawyer for timber companies that intervened in the case, said the hearings gave his side the chance to confront the biologists responsible for locking up vast tracks of timber for owl habitat and show how important logging is to the economy.

"The most important points for the Endangered Species

Committee are covered in testimony that the 44 timber sales here will produce 3,000 jobs in the Pacific Northwest, and that if the sales are not sold, American consumers will pay \$500 million in higher prices for lumber products," Rutzick said.

"No one testified that the spotted owl would suffer any significant impairment if the sales were sold," he added. "The testimony has been very vague and generalized and didn't deal with these timber sales at all."

Pat Parenteau, a lawyer representing U.S. Fish and Wildlife, pointed to testimony from Barry Noon, a U.S. Forest Service ecologist, that the owl was even worse off than earlier believed.

"His conclusion that timber harvesting on BLM lands essentially has to cease for the owl to have any chance for recovery was probably the most dramatic testimony of the whole proceeding," Parenteau said.

Parenteau said BLM had failed to prove that the 219 million board feet of timber at stake was economically significant, when the nation uses 50 billion board feet annually.

To grant an exemption, the committee must find that the BLM had "no reasonable and prudent alternatives," that the sales would be economically significant, and the benefits of logging would outweigh the value of the habitat.

The committee is made up of seven members, including Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan Jr., Agriculture Secretary Edward Madigan and Army Secretary Michael Stone. Also on the panel are the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, the chief of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and one per-

son nominated by Oregon Gov. Barbara Roberts.

This is only the third time since the Endangered Species Act became law in 1973 that the God Squad has been convened to consider an exemption. An exemption for construction of the Tellico Dam in Tennessee was denied in favor of a small fish called the snail darter. And the proposed Greylocks Dam on the Wyoming-Nebraska border was turned down for one of the original endangered species, the whooping crane.

Loggers, millworkers and Main Street businessmen from timber country were not given a chance to testify at the hearings. In response to their complaints, Lujan, who chairs the God Squad, has set two more days for public testimony starting Feb. 12 in Portland.

Lujan convened the God Squad, saying he hoped it would bring an end to the long battle over the Northwest's forests. But it is really only a small part of a much larger conflict raging over federal lands in Washington, Oregon and Northern California.

Environmentalists have won a series of victories in lawsuits charging the BLM and the Forest Service routinely violated the nation's environmental laws in planning timber sales in spotted owl habitat.

Just last week, a U.S. district judge in Portland blocked BLM timber sales in spotted owl habitat in Oregon because the agency failed to write an environmental impact statement.

Environmentalists said the ruling could make moot whatever the God Squad does, because it covers the same timber sales, but is based on a different law, the National Environmental Policy Act.

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Miss America emcee dies of lung disease



LA JOLLA, Calif. (AP) — Bert Parks, the TV game show host and beauty pageant emcee who serenaded Miss Americas for 25 years with his trademark song, "There She Is," died Sunday. He was 77.

Parks, who was diagnosed recently with an inoperable lung disease, died at Scripps Memorial Hospital in his sleep, with his wife and children at his side, said Mark Howell, a family friend.

In addition to emceeing the Miss America pageant for 25 years, Parks also worked in radio, television and films. His stage credits include the starring role in a Broadway production of the "The Music Man."

Born in Atlanta as Bert Jacobson, Parks began his career while still young and changed his name to fit a marquee. He was hired at 16 for his first broadcasting job by an Atlanta radio station.

Parks landed his first job as a singer on the "Eddie Cantor Show." He later worked as a staff announcer for CBS from 1933 until 1939.

Before becoming the Miss America pageant emcee, Parks' big break came in 1945, when he landed the emcee job on the radio quiz show, "Break the Bank." He gained wider fame as a radio personality beginning in 1948 as the host of "Stop the Music."

Both radio shows soon moved to television, along with Parks. It wasn't long before he was seen in daytime on quiz shows and in prime time. He was host of TV's "Double or Nothing" from 1953-1955.

He wound up hosting a dozen game shows, but it was as the tuxedo-clad crooner serenading Miss Americas in Atlantic City that he became known to millions.

Parks was fired as the Miss America Pageant emcee in 1980. Pageant officials said they wanted to give the show a younger look. His firing gener-

ated nationwide sympathy and a letter-writing campaign organized by Johnny Carson.

"This was the (time) Ronald Reagan, who's five years older than me, was elected president," Parks said in a 1990 interview. "He could run the country, but I was too old to run a beauty pageant. Now is that sick or what?"

Parks made a special return appearance in 1990, when he sang along with a recording of his signature song. He received a standing ovation when he walked on stage, but the appearance was marred by gaffes and he did not return.

Miss America Pageant Organization chief executive Leonard Horn praised Parks late Sunday for his role in building the pageant's reputation.

"He was a very important part of our history, and because of what he contributed, we have a present and a future," Horn said, lauding Parks for "his ability to let the young women be the stars."

After the Miss America firing, Parks went on to emcee other pageants ranging from a tugboat competition to a contest judging small dogs.

In an endearing and quirky cameo, Parks played himself in the 1990 film comedy "The Freshman" with Marlon Brando. In a send-up of his own beauty pageant performances, he serenaded a giant endangered lizard that was to be served up as the main course of a banquet.

He also had a dramatic television career. He began to act in the 1960s, making guest appearances on "Burke's Law," and in the '70s on "Ellery Queen" and "The Bionic Woman."

Parks also appeared as ringmaster of the syndicated Circus series in the early 1970s.

Parks is survived by his wife of 48 years, Annette; his twin sons Joel and Jeffrey; daughter Annette Jr.; and two grandchildren.