

Idaho senator proposes changes to logging legislation

But environmentalists say the draft revisions would increase logging on federal lands

By Scott Sonner
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sen. Larry Craig formally proposed rewriting the nation's forest-management laws Tuesday, emphasizing the 80 changes he has made in draft legislation lambasted by environmentalists last year.

Craig, R-Idaho, said his introduction to the "Public Lands Management Improvement Act of 1997" includes several changes intended to address conservationists' concerns.

"Never before has this committee, or perhaps any Senate panel, gone so far to assure that every person or group who wished to participate in discussions or make recommendations was heard,"

said Craig, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources subcommittee on forests and public lands.

For one thing, Craig said Forest Service rules would be changed to allow bidding on national-forest timber sales by groups or companies that do not intend to harvest the trees.

"This is a major step," the senator said.

But environmentalists said Craig's revisions appeared to have the same thrust and objectives as the draft proposals, which they had said would dramatically increase logging on federal lands and put fish and wildlife at risk.

"It's a 90-page timber industry wish list instead of a 100-page timber industry wish list," said Marty Hayden of the Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund, formerly known as the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund.

Carl Ross, executive director of Save America's Forests, said the proposal would "permanently destroy the last wild forests in America."

"There's little change in making timber the dominant use of our federal lands," said Robert Dewey of Defenders of Wildlife.

Clinton administration officials maintain there is no need to rewrite the National Forest Management Act or other laws that regulate logging and other activities on national forest lands.

Craig said his proposal would have no immediate impact on logging levels. He said he suspects it will be a year or more before it has a chance of being signed into law.

"This bill has nothing to do with cutting trees. It has everything to do with making decisions," Craig said.

"From recreation to conservation to commodity production,

many forest functions in too many forests have come to a virtual standstill," he said.

"Agencies are bickering and unable to work together, many forests are in a state of decline and no one — except perhaps the lawyers — is very happy about these conditions."

Craig said he was making a separate bill out of one provision in his draft measure, a proposal to allow states to petition Congress to take over management of all or part of the federal lands within their borders.

Other changes in the main bill include requiring the Fish and Wildlife Service to certify the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management before those agencies could check off on their own plans for fish and wildlife protected under the Endangered Species Act. Currently those agencies must obtain FWS approval of individual protection plans.

One thing that didn't change from the previous draft was Craig's proposal that Congress be required to confirm the administration's choice for chief of the Forest Service. Such confirmation is not now required.

Craig appeared before reporters with a slide rule and stack of old computer-data cards, which he said underscored the changes that have taken place since the 1970s.

"These were the tools of measurement 20 years ago when we passed forest reforms," he said, referring to the National Forest Management Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and Endangered Species Act and other laws he wants to rewrite.

Labor groups joined the Society of Professional Foresters in praising Craig's efforts.

"The current system of land-management laws is dysfunctional," said Mike Draper, chairman of an industry-labor group.

Industry chief says cancer link unproven

By Catherine Wilson
The Associated Press

MIAMI — The scientific director of the industry-funded Council for Tobacco Research acknowledged Tuesday that, in terms of statistics and everyday usage, smoking causes cancer.

But Harmon McAllister testified in a landmark secondhand-smoke trial that the exact mechanism hasn't been found, so a separate scientific definition of "cause" leaves the cancer link unproven.

On cross-examination, McAllister was required to answer the question, "Does cigarette smoking cause lung cancer or doesn't it?"

"In the epidemiologist's framework, sure. In the common, everyday terms — 'Does smoking cause cancer?' — not thinking of it scientifically, you can accept that. Yes, it does," he said. "There's no doubt that the association is very strong, that public health measures need to be taken."

McAllister repeatedly said he didn't think he was taking an inconsistent position as a defense witness in a \$5 billion suit by the nation's flight attendants who blame an assortment of illnesses on smoky cabin air.

He also acknowledged the American Lung Association, Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital and some others no longer accept council grants for ethical reasons.

The American Medical Association is pushing researchers and medical journals to reject council money because it comes from the profits of cigarette makers.

McAllister spent much of his direct testimony describing in laudatory terms the trade group's \$300 million in grants and 6,000 studies, calling it "some of the finest research that goes on."

But he touched only lightly on two other functions — special projects commissioned by cigarette industry lawyers to help with lawsuits and its long-term but discontinued service offering the industry's position on unfavorable smoking-related research.

The trial in the lawsuit filed in 1991 could prove to be the only major tobacco case to be decided by a jury because of the proposed \$368 billion nationwide settlement that would erase such suits.

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