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OUR VIEW

Nuance can't replace 'yes' or 'no' on monument

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, responding to questions from Rep. Greg Walden during hearings March 1, said she's unaware of any active plan in the administration to designate an Owyhee Canyonlands national monument.

That's good news, as far as it goes.

Backed by the Oregon Natural Desert Association, the proposed Owyhee Canyonlands wilderness and conservation area would cover 40 percent of Oregon's Malheur County — about 2.5 million acres of what is now controlled by the Bureau of Land Management.

Residents believe the designation would be accompanied by restrictions

and regulations that would prohibit or severely complicate grazing, mining, hunting and recreation.

While proponents say traditional uses of the land will be allowed, a local group called Citizens in Opposition to the Owyhee Canyonlands Monument does not believe them.

There's quite a bit of opposition to the plan in Eastern Oregon. A lot of people see it as another example of the federal government putting the desires of distant special interests ahead of the local community.

While supporters are well organized, have money, have a website, have drawn up maps and detailed proposals,

Jewell downplayed it during her testimony.

"It's been kicking around, it's one of the things people have recommended to us," Jewell said.

But she said the Interior Department, which includes the BLM and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has held no community meetings or discussions about the idea.

"People haven't been actively in my office asking about it," Jewell said.

Walden asked if there has been any coordination between the White House and Department of Interior on the issue.

"Not that I'm aware of," Jewell replied.

You would think that she would know. But forgive us

for not taking this as the last word on the subject from an administration that has raised nuance to an art form.

With 10 months and change left in President Obama's tenure, there's plenty of time for the plan to move forward.

While the administration has previously said it would work collaboratively with Congress, local interests and elected officials in making such designations, because the land in question is already owned by the federal government the Antiquities Act of 1906 requires only that Obama pick up his pen and proclaim it so. No fuss, no muss.

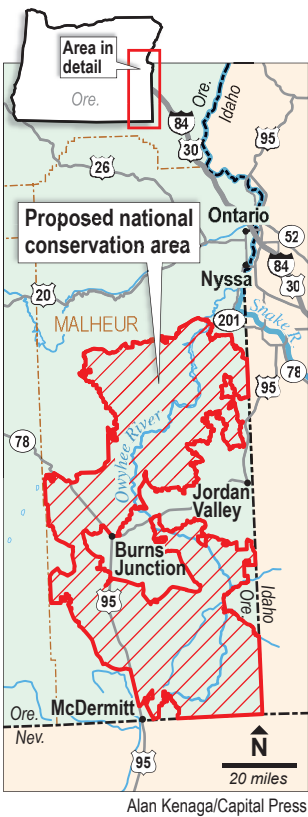
In February he designated three such monuments in the

California desert covering almost 1.8 million acres.

The fear on the ground is that the White House will play coy, carefully denying what is not true, not addressing what is true. Then, somewhere after the election and before Jan. 20 the deal will be done.

Walden said the angst many rural westerners feel over government management of public lands and federal overreach would be made worse by such a declaration. We agree.

The president and his representatives should just say no. Absent that, they should honestly telegraph their intentions and engage in an honest debate with the people of Malheur County and the West.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

Where water quality, property rights meet

OUR VIEW

Washington state's hunger for land insatiable

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife owns or manages a million acres, and has its eye on 10,000 more.

The price tag is \$13.3 million.

The 10 parcels range from a 5,542-acre ranch in Lincoln County in Eastern Washington to 13 acres of wetlands in Snohomish County in Western Washington. Most of the properties have been used for livestock grazing or crop production.

WDFW says most of the land will be used for recreation — hunting, fishing, hiking — and wildlife conservation.

Some could be leased to farmers and ranchers.

A million acres under management, and it wants more. It wants land now in productive, private use. Land on the tax rolls. Once it has one million and ten thousand acres, how much more?

In addition to the WDFW holdings, the Department of Natural Resources has 3.1 million acres. There are 112,282 acres in state parks. The federal government owns 12.7 million acres.

To the state's credit, it's buying from willing sellers. We can't fault property owners for making a good deal. Good

for them.

But does the state really need more?

The Washington Farm Bureau is concerned WDFW is driving up land prices and gradually taking land out of agriculture production.

"It's death by a thousand cuts," the Farm Bureau's government relations director, Tom Davis, said.

At a time when Washington residents are questioning the state's management of wildfires on public lands, and when there's a growing dissatisfaction with the size of public holdings, we wonder if enough isn't enough.

Goal is to get people to leave rural West

By LOREN STOUT
For the Capital Press

In all the news coverage about the incident in Burns, Ore., I have not seen any reporting on the main driving forces behind the occupation. What has been kept quiet is the involvement of our federal senators, government agencies and environmental groups in driving a bunch of ranchers to such extreme measures.

During the last 20 years a huge amount of lawsuits has been filed by the government and environmental groups to try and put the miners, farmers, ranchers and loggers out of business.

During one of the lawsuits I was involved in, the environmentalists were called out for using inadequate data and unqualified personnel to further their claims. At this point it became very apparent the lengths the environmentalists and some federal and state employees would go to put rural people out of business.

To alleviate this situation, we got the bright idea to meet with Sen. Ron Wyden. During this face-to-face meeting, he told us these practices were

wrong and to give him a call anytime and that he would help us. About a month later one of the ranchers that was at the meeting met with the senator's staff. He asked for some help and was told that the ranchers were not on the senator's priority list, and would not help us.

New secretary

A real blow to the rural West came when Sen. Wyden decided lawsuits were not crushing the rural people fast enough. They saw their opening when the Secretary of the Interior lost his job. The confirmation hearings for the new person amounted to nothing.... It appears this person's only relevant qualification was the ability to go after the rural lifestyle with whatever means it took. This person is now secretary of Interior.

It has paid huge dividends. All of the court cases that have been won by the citizens of the U.S. can now be circumvented by regulations. A perfect example is the sage grouse. The people thought there was finally some justice when it was not listed as endangered but as it turns out they are worse off because of

the regulations the new secretary of Interior imposed.

A little closer to home, the plan is to steal 2 million acres from Malheur County to tie up the mineral deposits and in the process put all the ranchers out of business.

Looking back on it, there has been a systematic breakdown of the rural West since the 1990s. The politicians and the environmentalists learned there was a lot of money to be made by eliminating the rural people and the jobs that were associated with natural resources. If they could stop the schools from being funded and with no jobs to make payments, people surely had to leave.

More regulation

Then came the idea if we create more government agencies, they can tie up the resources with endless regulation, and nothing will be managed and every citizen loses. The agencies learned they would be rewarded if they fol-

lowed this very premise.

No matter whether you agree or disagree with the people who took over the Malheur Refuge, they did bring to light the abuses and prejudices that are being used against the rural communities and citizens of the rural West for individual gain. We have been sold like a band of sheep.

Tip of iceberg

The rural people have always been very resilient. I believe this ordeal in Burns may be the tip of the iceberg. It also shows how far the government is willing to go to protect its financial dealings. They do not bring in 200 para-military personnel just to collect an overdue grazing bill from a single rancher in Nevada.

Get to the bottom of that question and we may get some answers on who and why they are willing to sacrifice the livelihoods of thousands of Americans because of what we do for a living and where we choose to live.

Loren Stout's family arrived in Grant County, Ore., in 1878. He is currently caretaker of a ranch near John Day.

Readers' views

Water quality, property rights

Everyone knows the best water quality comes from forestland. So how do we find the balance between those who believe they have the right to make demands on landowners and those who have the responsibility to care for our forests, with all the associated costs?

There are two groups of people in our society focusing on water quality from forestland: the "believers" who conclude it's their right to have access to high water quality at any cost, and the "caretakers" who own the land and provide the protections that keep a forest a forest.

Harvesting timber, followed by reforestation, is the most logical way for caretakers to pay the bills and keep a forest a forest while continuing to provide amenities believers expect.

Forest and water quality are deeply respected by caretakers, whose families' livelihoods depend on a strong long-term relationship. However, forest management goals established

decades ago may prove foolish today if more restrictions are placed on the land near streams. When the Oregon Board of Forestry decides new riparian rules for small and medium streams under the Forest Practices Act, there's a potential financial impact on caretakers that can challenge their ability and desire to keep a forest a forest.

Society must find a balance between a precautionary mandate promoted by believers and the realities associated with a caretaker's ability to keep a forest a forest.

Otherwise, we face a possible negative water quality outcome when forestland is converted to some other use at the discretion of the landowner.

Only time will tell, but over-regulation has the potential to make things worse for water quality, not better.

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