

Rallies held against states’ push to control U.S. lands

By **BRADY MCCOMBS**
AND **RILEY SNYDER**
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Several hundred people gathered Monday at rallies in Utah and Nevada to demonstrate their opposition to efforts by some Western states to seize control of federal lands.

Inside the Utah state Capitol in Salt Lake City, more than 200 people held signs that read: “Protect Wild Utah” or “No Utah land grab.” They listened to speeches from leaders of conservation, wildlife and business groups who warned that transferring nearly 31 million acres of public land in Utah would limit access for hunters and outdoor-recreation enthusiasts and harm wildlife by splintering habitat.

Handing the lands over to the state would risk cutting into one of Utah’s biggest draw for tourists, families and major companies looking to relocate, said Peter Metcalf, president and chief executive of Salt Lake City-based Black Diamond Inc., an outdoor gear company.

“The federally managed public lands are the basis for Utah’s extraordinary quality of life and for the most important, sustainable, strategic economic competitive advantage we have,” Metcalf said. “It can’t be ripped off in China or done more cheaply in Bangladesh.”

Utah lawmakers passed a 2012 law demanding that the federal government hand over about 31 million acres of public land by the start of this year. But the deadline for the transfer passed with no



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer

Several hundred people gather for a rally inside the Utah State Capitol March 2 in Salt Lake City. People gathered Monday at rallies in Utah and Nevada to demonstrate their opposition to efforts by some Western states to seize control of federal lands.

action in a move predicted by both critics and supporters.

Utah lawmakers have pointed to an 800-page report released in December as to how the state could afford to manage the land. The report, which cost \$500,000, found that oil and gas leases would allow Utah to cover the \$280 million annual cost of managing the land, but only if those prices remained high.

The land demand does not include national parks, wilderness areas and national monuments, with the exception of the roughly 3,000-square-mile Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and its underground coal reserves.

The land-transfer requests have been met with fierce opposition from conservation groups, who say cash-strapped states would be

more likely to sell off public lands and close them to recreational activities. Overall, the U.S. government controls vast sections of land in many Western states, including more than 80 percent of Nevada and about two-thirds of Utah.

Lawmakers in Wyoming and Idaho have also introduced legislation asking the federal government to transfer public lands to the control of state agencies. The measure in Wyoming died. Idaho’s bill is just being introduced.

At a rally held Monday in Nevada in front of the state Legislature in Carson City, several dozen people showed displeasure with a legislative resolution asking for 7.2 million acres of public lands to be handed over to state officials.

The protest comes from a bipartisan concern that the land transfers could limit the amount of public access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational activities, Nevada Sierra Club lobbyist Anne Macquarie said.

Nevada Republican Sen. Don Gustavson sponsored the resolution and said the federal government has long mismanaged public lands. “There’s no question in my mind that we’re going to protect these lands for Nevadans,” he said.

Bill Christensen of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation spoke at the Utah rally. Before the rally, he said about his opposition to the land transfer: “Even though I don’t always agree with the feds, I’d rather work with a devil I know than a devil I don’t know.”

BRIEFLY

Environmental groups sue over plan to kill wolves

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Five environmental groups have filed a lawsuit against the federal government challenging its authority to kill endangered wolves in Washington state.

The lawsuit was filed Tuesday against the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services program.

The lawsuit contends federal law requires USDA to prepare a full environmental impact statement before it can hunt and kill wolves in Washington.

The agency recently completed a less-detailed environmental assessment. The environmental groups say that document fails to provide data to support several of its core assertions.

Wolves were hunted to extinction in Washington in the early 1900s. The species began to return to the state from neighboring Idaho and British Columbia in the early 2000s, and the wolf population has grown to 13 confirmed packs. There have been conflicts between wolves and livestock.

Winter wolf harvests in N. Rockies drop

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Trappers in Montana have killed 77 gray wolves and hunters have shot 127 so far this winter — a total of 204 animals — as the season for the animals nears its end.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks spokesman Ron

Aasheim said the final tally for this winter’s wolf harvest is expected to fall short of the 230 wolves killed in the 2013-2014 season.

The trapping season closed Feb. 28, and Montana’s rifle hunting season for gray wolves ends March 15.

Six of the predators have been killed by landowners, under a new state law that allows wolves to be killed if they are considered a potential threat to livestock or human safety.

In neighboring Idaho hunters have shot 113 of the animals so far this winter and trappers have killed 92.

The state’s total harvest of 205 wolves is well short of the prior year’s total of 302 animals killed.

Idaho’s wolf season ends March 31 for most of the state but continues year-round in some areas.

Wyoming did not have a wolf hunting season this winter. After losing their federal protections across the Northern Rockies in 2011 and 2012, wolves were put back on the endangered species list in Wyoming in September under a court order.

U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson sided with wildlife advocates who said Wyoming’s declaration of wolves as unprotected predators that could be shot on sight in most of the state afforded insufficient protection.

Legislation pending before Congress would nullify the judge’s decision.

There were 1,691 wolves in the Northern Rockies at the end of 2013, the most recent data available.

SKI REPORT

Spout Springs
Tollgate, Ore.
CLOSED FOR SEASON

Anthony Lakes
North Powder, Ore.
New snow: None
Base depth: 50"
Conditions: Clear, calm

Ski Bluewood
Dayton, Wash.
New snow: none
Base depth: 25"
Conditions: Spotty coverage, machine groomed

Ski Fergi
Joseph, Ore.
CLOSED.
LACK OF SNOW

Mt. Hood Meadows
Government Camp, Ore.
New snow: none
Base depth: 32"
Conditions: Groomed, but some runs closed.

Timberline Lodge
Timberline, Ore.
New snow: none
Base depth: 50"
Conditions: Groomed, sunny, calm skies

Mt. Bachelor
Bend, Ore.
New snow: none
Base depth: 50"
Conditions: Sunny, groomed. Resort is hosting the 2015 United States Collegiate Skiing and Snowboarding Association National Championships March 1 through March 7.

Yellowstone National Park’s Boiling River is heating up

By **LIZ KEARNEY**
LIVINGSTON ENTERPRISE

GARDINER, MONT. — If you think Yellowstone National Park’s Boiling River feels hotter this winter, you’re right.

The temperature of the thermally heated water that flows into the Gardner River at a popular swimming hole has been increasing slightly since August of last year, park spokeswoman Amy Bartlett said.

In August, the temperature was approximately 134 degrees Fahrenheit. Through seven days at the end of February, the temperature in the pools ranged from about 136.5 to 139.5 degrees.

These temperatures are too hot to swim in, explained park geologist Henry “Hank” Heasler, but dilution with cold water occurs where the Boiling River meets the Gardner. He said 120 degrees is the temperature considered “scalding,” which can burn people, especially children.

Park regulations prohibit swimming in hot springs and runoff that are of entirely thermal origin. The prohibition is two-pronged — one, thermal features are fragile and can be damaged by human activity; and two, hot springs are dangerous because water temperatures can spike suddenly.

But park regulations allow swimming in many places where hot water meets a cold water stream — like where the Boiling River meets the Gardner. The swimming hole is located within the park between the North Entrance at Gardiner and Mammoth Hot Springs.

Longtime locals swimming at

Boiling River on Feb. 22 told *Livingston Enterprise* Managing Editor Justin Post the water seemed hotter than they’ve ever remembered it. A small cascade of hot water that in the past has been pleasant to sit under was unapproachably hot one recent Sunday, Post said.

Heasler, who has been with the park for about 12 years, said he and his staff aren’t absolutely certain what’s going on, but they are examining a couple of theories.

One theory is cold water flowing into the Boiling River through underground sinkholes in the underlying travertine is being blocked or diverted somehow.

A test of the hypothesis happened by accident last summer when water flowing into a sinkhole was temporarily diverted while park staff addressed an area of invasive plants.

While that water was diverted, the temperature of Boiling River increased, Heasler told the *Livingston Enterprise*.

Heasler had another confirmation of this theory in January. On one of the coldest days of the winter, the Boiling River temperature climbed to 140 degrees.

“I went and looked, and the sinkhole had frozen over,” Heasler said.

Heasler compared the water flow to a kitchen faucet. Imagine turning on the hot water, he said. That water is pretty hot. Then turn on the cold water. The amount of water coming out of the faucet doesn’t change, but by turning on the cold water, the temperature drops. And conversely, by turning down the cold water, the temperature rises.

Another explanation for the per-



AP Photo/Livingston Enterprise, Justin Post

In this Feb. 22 photo, steam rises near the center of the Gardner River at Yellowstone National Park’s Boiling River in Montana. The temperature of the thermally heated water that flows into the Gardner River at the popular swimming hole has been increasing slightly since August of last year, park spokeswoman Amy Bartlett said.

ceived increase in temperature could be that the Gardner River itself is at lower seasonal flow rates, which means less cold water to dilute the hot, Heasler said. Stream flows are naturally lower in winter when mountain water is locked up in frozen snowpack at higher elevations. Rivers run higher in the spring and summer when snow melts.

And a graph showing Boiling River’s temperature from March of last year to the end of January of this year shows the stream’s lowest temperatures, between 105 and 110 degrees, occurring in late May-early June, the time of highest runoff.

The water flow and temperature of Boiling River and the Gardner River are monitored at gauging stations placed by the United States Geological Survey.

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From left: Peter Wong, Hillary Borrund, Mateusz Perkowski