

Third of a four-part series

OUR FEDERAL LANDS

The Conservation Movement

1891 The Forest Reserve Act or "Creative Act" allows the president to set aside forest reserves from the public domain. President Benjamin Harrison puts 13 million acres into forested reserve. Largely regarded as the beginning of the "conservation movement."

1893 McRae Bill authorizes 15 forest reserves.

1897 The "Organic Act" authorizes funds for administration of forest reserves from the Department of the Army to the General Land Office. President Grover Cleveland creates 21.4 million acres of forested reserveland. His successor, President William McKinley, adds 7 million acres.



1905 Congress transfers management of forest reserves to the Department of Agriculture,

eventually leading to the creation of the U.S. Forest Service.



1906 Antiquities Act permits federal protection of prehistoric, historic and scientifically significant sites and create national monuments.

1907 An amendment to the Ag Bill strips presidential power to create reserve land through executive order. President Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot create 16 million acres of reserve land before the law goes into effect.

1913-19 Several western state legislatures pass resolutions calling for ceding unreserved federal lands to the states.



1928 District land offices reduced to

29 from a high of 123 in 1890.



1929 The Great Depression begins; President Herbert Hoover proposes unallocated federal lands be ceded to state control. A subsequent bill fails to gain congressional support.

1934 Taylor Grazing Act places 80 million acres, mostly rangeland, into grazing districts to help protect against overuse.



1940 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is created within the Department of the Interior.



President Theodore Roosevelt (left) and naturalist John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, on Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park, 1906.



Sources: Congressional Research Service; U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management; USDA Forest Service; The Forest History Society; EO Media Group research

Alan Kenaga/Capitol Press

Next week: The Immutable Public Lands

Bill would allow states to buy national forest land

Legislation intended to boost logging

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

An Alaska congressman wants to allow states to acquire up to 2 million acres of national forest land from the federal government to manage primarily for logging.

Republican Rep. Don Young introduced the State National Forest Management Act of 2015 in September, four months before armed militants began occupying the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns.

The militants, led by Ammon Bundy, decried the perceived mismanagement of public lands during the 41-day standoff and demanded they be returned to local control. Young's bill — the State National Forest Management Act of 2015 — would let state legislatures decide if they want to buy national forest land from the Forest Service, or exchange land of equal value with the feds.

The goal is to spur timber production on the forests. At a House committee hearing on Thursday, Young referred primarily to southeast Alaska and the Tongass National

Forest, but the bill does not exclude other states with national forests.

"The worst managed lands in the United States by our federal government is the Forest Service lands," Young said. "It's because they become park rangers instead of silviculturists. They don't understand the harvesting. They don't understand the impact on communities."

In Eastern Oregon, more than 17 mills have closed over the last 25 years with 1,200 jobs lost, according to a forest policy analyst with Boise Cascade. Meanwhile, the Forest Service spent more than half its budget to fight wildfires in 2015.

Young's bill would require the Forest Service to convey land back to the state if its legislature passes a bill to do so, along with all buildings used to manage that land.

The bill does not include wilderness or other protected areas to transfer, and caps the amount of land at 2 million acres per state. By comparison, the Umatilla National Forest covers 1.4 million acres.

Forest employees who are not retained by the state would have the option of being placed within an "equivalent position in the federal government," according to the bill.

Rep. Greg Walden, R-Oregon, sat next to Young at Thursday's hearing to testify on another bill. Walden did, however, speak generally about the impact of federal forest management on Eastern Oregon communities.

"We're creating, through federal policies and litigation, impoverished communities and impoverished people, and that's not what we should be doing," Walden said.

A spokesman said Walden is supportive of more state and local control of federal lands to increase active management, improve forest health and restore jobs. He said Young's bill is an excellent idea, and should be one of many options on the table to fix forest policy.

Not everyone agrees. Corey Fisher, senior public lands policy director for Trout Unlimited in Missoula, Montana, said such a bill would jeopardize multiple uses and recreation on millions of acres.

"Hunters and anglers will continue to reject these ill-conceived ideas, because we know these lands and we know just how much we have to lose," Fisher said.

Fisher said the organization understands there are issues with land management, but argued the solution isn't to change ownership. He said it's about working together to address problems from the ground up.

George Wuerthner, Oregon state director for the

Western Watershed Project, agreed the public would lose out on public lands, and said the state might also take on costs it couldn't handle.

In Utah, the legislature passed a bill in 2012 requiring the transfer of federal land to the state. A 784-page report estimates the cost to the state could be about \$245 million per year. Whether or not the state makes up that

money would depend on a number of factors around the initial transition.

"Any individual state that takes over has to pay for the upkeep that might now be shared among 50 states," said Wuerthner, a former botanist with the Bureau of Land Management in Idaho.

Young's bill remains under consideration in the House Committee on Natural Resources.

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