

10/22/05  
From: F. Carl Pence, USFS, Retired  
To: Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health  
Subject: CIEDRA ( Central Idaho Economic Development Recreation Act)

I am a “reluctant participant” in this hearing. When I retired I was “burnt-out” from trying to get professional land management implemented in spite of today’s polarized, self absorbed and litigious society. I promised myself I would not get involved as a retiree, but here I am. Additionally, I am a conservative, registered Republican and share many values with Congressman Simpson. I hope my testimony shows me neither professionally nor politically inconsistent.

I offer my thoughts from a practical management perspective. My 40-year career was all at the district and forest levels, where on-the-ground implementation occurs. Ten years involved Idaho experience; five of those were as SNRA Area Ranger. I might add I am an Idaho native, born and raised in Custer County.

Although I appreciate the hard work given to develop this proposal, it includes several aspects that concern me. Today, I’ll focus on my primary concern, the dedication of some 370,000 acres to primarily serve motorized recreation, specifically ORV use.

ORV recreation is a legitimate use of the National Forest System. However, establishing it as a primary use, as is done in Title III of this Bill, significantly narrows options for future management in nearly an irreversibly fashion and creates long-term additional costs. Once enacted, it would take another act of Congress to change.

I have been involved in similar efforts to allocate areas to a primary use, at a certain level: such as, livestock animal unit months, or millions of board feet of timber. In CIEDRA, the dedication is in existing trail miles and motorized recreation acres. I have never seen this work in a practical world with ever changing public values, and with limited budget realities.

Specific identification of a privileged user group, in this case ORVers, will diminish the need for that use to consider other values. While most ORV users are responsible, those who aren’t will feel empowered to do what they want, and will create an additional challenge to managers and enforcement officers. The nature of ORV use is to push the limits of machine and personal skill and it is extremely difficult and costly to keep “pioneering” of new trails from occurring.

The Bill establishes an implementation budget for ORV trails, but long-term needs will be inadequately funded because this Bill initiates a recipe for failure. As the novelty of a “Special ORV Area” becomes reality and motorized use increases, more resource damage will occur, requiring managers to re-route or improve and harden trails, thus allowing for more use and additional damage, therefore increasing long-term costs. Certainly, the total FS budget will not increase to accommodate these initial and long-term costs. Therefore, Managers will have to rob from Peter to pay Paul, or give Peter and Paul inadequate funding to meet the overall management needs.

When I assumed the Area Ranger job in 1987 this management and budget phenomenon had been occurring since creation of the SNRA. The special NRA designation had increased use, and adequate funding had not been allocated. As a result, then Congressman Larry Craig was studying the possibility of transferring the SNRA to the National Park Service with the thought that better funding and protection of the area’s values would occur. The FS managed to quell this interest only by redirecting funding from other Forests within the Region to the SNRA (they stole from Peter to pay Paul). I vividly remember the resentment my peers had when they realized their recreation programs were being sacrificed to fund the SNRA. This legislation would be no different. I wonder where we would be today if the constituency Senator Craig was responding to had prevailed, and now the Park Service managed the SNRA.

Please do not tie the hands of future managers in a manner where they cannot address the values of the future by dedicating this area to motorized use, at a certain level and acreage and setting them up for failure due to unfunded mandates this Bill creates.

Considering the whole proposal, I cannot help but wonder if there is a real need for it, as proposed, at this time. Yes, the White Clouds includes high wilderness values, however, no significant threats exist to these values. In the Jerry Peak area, where some proponents feel this Bill is the only way to save the area from “unbridled motorized use”, Federal agencies need to be encouraged to implement mandates they already have to protect soil stability, water quality and other values. They don’t need an “overlay” of expensive legislation; they need bold managers and adequate congressional support.

As a native of Custer County, I appreciate the intent to help the area’s economy. However, the complexities of this bill, where it gives a little to all and mixes environmental and social issues could lead the reviewer to only think of the short-term fix to their own self interest and not view the overall long-term cost, both to our Nation’s limited fiscal resources, and to the

changes that will occur from increased ORV use, and to the historic character of Stanley, a place myself and other past managers spent so much to try to preserve as PL92-400 directs.

So I ask the question, "What are the real benefits and needs for this proposal?" I know the effort to designate the White Clouds as Wilderness is long-standing. But, to achieve that by compromising management flexibility and increasing long-term costs, in an uncertain future does not seem wise to me.

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