

From the Intermountain Observer

The Governor

on the ranch

by Sam Day

A new tug-of-war opened up this week between Gov. Don Samuelson and the State Board of Education, where relations already are strained by an open conflict over the question of funding for the state's colleges and universities.

The disagreement this time is over the board's proposed purchase of a 65-acre ranch in the Idaho Primitive Area for use as a University of Idaho wilderness ecology research center.

Two board emissaries, meeting privately with the Governor, tried in vain to budge him from his position in hopes of heading off a collision. In the end, the board voted to proceed with the purchase despite Samuelson's objections.

At issue is the question of whether the ranch, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Jess R. Taylor on Big Creek near the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, ought to remain in private hands or be turned to the university for fish and wildlife studies.

While the university wants the ranch, so, too, does a Boise real estate man, Martin Rust, who's a long-time friend of the Governor. Rust says he's willing to match the university's cash offer for the ranch. He says he wants to develop it as a guest ranch for big game hunters and other recreationists.

While on a flying trip over the Primitive Area last summer, Rust drew the Governor's attention to the university's proposed purchase of the Taylor Ranch. Since then, Samuelson has been putting pressure on board members and university officials to keep hands off the ranch.

The Governor says the land should remain on the Valley County tax rolls and Big game hunters should continue to be able to enjoy its use. The university says the taxes are insignificant (they amounted to only \$68 last year) and sportsmen can continue to enjoy the area if they come in on foot.

The university has assured the Board of Education and the State Fish & Game Department that the game harvest at the ranch would be continued, but a prospectus published by the university some months ago made it clear that hunting and fishing would no longer be encouraged if the sale goes through.

Under the university's management, visits to the ranch would be by permission only. Hunting and fishing parties and other recreationists, mining interests and outfitter & guide services would be denied use of the landing field and other facilities.

The university says the same rules would apply to its own personnel. Visitation would be on a "business only" basis.

"The university does not intend to 'lock up' the area to the public," it says. "Official visitors and those with a genuine interest in viewing research activities and facilities would be welcomed."

Dr. Ernest W. Hartung, the University of Idaho president, who has had his eye on the property for years, describes it as an ecological paradise holding unique advantages for the study of deer, elk and bighorn sheep herds and salmon and steelhead spawning beds. He says no other available site in Idaho has such advantages. The ranch is also richly endowed with

cougar, a disappearing species in the United States. It would be used as the operational headquarters for Dr. Maurice Hor-nocker, a university game biologist who is in the fourth year of a five-year pioneer study of the cougar.

To make matters even better for the university, the Taylors have agreed to sell the ranch to the university at what the board considers a bargain price of \$100,-000, provided they can continue to live in their ranch home in the summers.

The university paid a \$5,000 option on the property last year. The transaction would have gone through without a hitch if it hadn't been for the fact that just about everything connected with the deal rubs the Governor the wrong way.

He views it as part of an overall effort, matched by policies of the U.S. Forest Service, to take wilderness lands off the tax rolls and lock them up, freezing out private development. He also sees the university's move as a bid to curtail big game hunting. He is highly dubious about the value of the cougar study, which Idaho stockmen have opposed because they regard it as a step toward reclassifying to a game animal, which would cut down the number that could be killed.

The issue came to a head when the board convened in Boise on Monday, six days before the expiration of the university's option to buy the Taylor ranch. Dr. Hartung told the board the Governor's objections were based on erroneous information. He asked for a payment of \$10,000 to extend the option to April 1st, when the balance of \$85,000 would be due.

The board was on the point of granting the request when one of its veteran members, Elvon Hampton of Genesee, mindful of the abrasive encounters which have marked the board's dealings with the Governor in recent months, suggested an attempt at conciliation. He went over to see Samuelson, taking with him Joseph McCollum of Twin Falls, who is Samuelson's only appointee on the board.

The two said later that the Governor appreciated the call. But he did most of the talking and it was evident he had his mind made up. After hearing from the emissaries the board voted Monday night to renew the option.

The Governor has some interested parties on his side. They include stockmen (who don't like the cougar study), outfitters and guides (who are alarmed at the disappearance of ready access to the wilderness by big game hunters) and Rust (who's as anxious as the university to get his hands on the Taylor ranch).

If the Governor wishes to pursue it, he could probably derail the purchase somehow or other before April 1st.

Aligned with the university and Board of Education are conservation, scientific and fish & wildlife management interests who want to see the ranch preserved for its ecological value. Knowing that an appropriation would run the certain risk of a gubernatorial veto, the board has taken the precaution of financing the purchase from gifts and from the interest on regents' funds.