

February 13, 1981

10658 Winterhawk  
Boise, Idaho 83709

Governor John Evans  
Statehouse  
Boise, Idaho 83702

Dear Governor Evans:

This letter is submitted in response to proposed legislation which seeks to transfer administrative responsibility for public lands from the Federal to state governments. The effort is commonly referred to as the "Sagebrush Rebellion". The Idaho Chapter of the Wildlife Society (I.C.W.S.) is dedicated to the purpose of protecting the natural habitat of wildlife communities concurrent with the needs and wants of the human community. We believe this purpose can best be met by retaining lands in public ownership and having them administered at the Federal level. Our objection to a public land transfer to the states is articulated in the following.

Public lands are a priceless heritage to the people of the State of Idaho. They provide natural resource products, vast quantities of high quality water, recreation, and inspiration for us all. Public lands provide for the quality of life we enjoy. This lifestyle has served as a stimuli for progressive industries to locate in our state, thereby providing employment for Idahoans and contributing to a stable, healthful economy.

Under Federal ownership, the cost of administering public lands is borne by the entire nation, with the people of Idaho the prime recipients of the benefits. A public lands transfer to the states would require a vast, expensive bureaucracy to be established at the state level to replace Federal stewardship. Given the present desires of the people to reduce taxes, it is unlikely the State of Idaho is capable of raising the revenue to accomplish this task. In addition, Idaho State law is not as comprehensive as Federal law in providing for all users of the public lands. In the absence of additional state lawmaking, a balanced approach to public land use is likely to be replaced by an inequitable system which allows some interests to benefit at the expense of others. We fear that general users of the public lands are the ones who will bear the burden.

The Federal Government has performed the role of steward of the public lands with increasing success. Under the direction of legislation supported by western Congressional delegations, Federal agencies have provided public access to the bureaucracy. Public participation is the forum for the exchange of information for special interests as well as the common folk. The message sent to the administering agencies by the peo-



ple has changed with time. No longer is agriculture, grazing, and mineral extraction the only significant uses of these lands. People have asked for multiple use which includes non-consumptive uses of public lands. Public comment has asked that the long-term health of public lands be considered as well as short-term exploitation. People have asked that development pay its full cost and that the public subsidy of private development be eliminated. This subsidy occurs when development is not expected to maintain existing, long-term values of the public lands. The I.C.W.S. believes that what has occurred is a rebalancing of interests which make use of public land, not an arrogant intent of Federal agencies to turn a deaf ear to traditional users. We believe the agencies have managed this difficult task with care, sensitivity and concern. In the absence of state monies to manage public lands and legislation to insure multiple use, a worst case scenario is likely to occur. That is, public lands would be sold to private interests to generate revenue. This would return us to a European system of land aristocracy where the rich retain ownership and control of land at the exclusion of the common folk. Not only would we lose our privilege to make use of public lands, but would also forfeit our public voice in its management. The result of such a land transfer is likely to benefit out-of-state interests with large capital and short term sights for development and exploitation.

In summary, our experience in dealing with the present stewards of the public lands (ie. the Federal Government) has been positive. By working within the system, we and other interests have provided comment to the administering agencies and have been listened to. We believe their activities are a result of successful resolution of conflicting interests, and represent a reasonable balance. We suggest other interests work within this system and join us in striving for its perfection.

Our ancestors wisely created public lands for our wise use. We must not squander such a treasure and betray their trust. Instead we must be enlightened managers of the public lands, and provide this heritage, intact, to our children for their wise use. The transfer of lands from the Federal to state governments is not the solution to the problem. With this letter, the I.C.W.S. formally states its opposition to the Sagebrush Rebellion or other large scale programs to transfer ownership of public domain lands.

Sincerely,

R. B. Tiedemann, Chairman  
Public Land Issues Committee

James F. Gore, President  
Idaho Chapter

cc: Dave LeRoy, Attorney General  
Gordon C. Trombey, Chairman State Land Board  
Senator Symms  
Senator McClure  
Representative Hansen  
Representative Craig  
Secretary of Interior Watt  
State Senators  
State Representatives