

Politics

The Post-Register, Idaho Falls, Wednesday, August 10, 1983 B-3

The national scene

Public land fate nearing decision

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Actions to be taken by two key figures who will appear in Idaho Falls Thursday will go a long way toward determining the fate of the entire spectrum of public lands. This includes both the rangeland of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the touchy wilderness classification.

The main principals in the scenario are Robert F. Burford, BLM director, and Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, influential Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee chairman.

Burford is keynote speaker for the annual Eastern Idaho Republican Barbecue and Rally at Tautphaus Park Thursday evening. McClure will preside over the second of four scheduled wilderness hearings around the state all day at Eagle Rock Junior High School.

What each man says and does will go a long way in helping settle the public lands issue, which is one of the foremost in the nation.

Both Burford and McClure in recent statements have left little doubt they lean toward more development of public lands, whether it be ranges, forests or others, than was carried out by the previous Carter administration.

Each seeks public input to give them guidelines on legislation and policies that will be implemented for the remaining 18 months of the Reagan administration.

They insist their policies are even-handed, but the more environmentally-oriented accuse them of leaning too heavily toward development. The users, meaning mostly farmers, ranchers and mining and lumbering interests, seem to be largely satisfied over what is happening.

In a recent Post-Register telephone interview, Burford said he believes his policies are achieving the even balance in land use the majority of people desire.

He said he felt the previous

Carter administration was tilted too much towards the protection of public lands at the expense of essential natural resource development. He declared his policies "are intended to move more towards the center of the arc" for what he called "a balanced development."

Burford said he feels "the charges made by many leaders that the administration had been much more even-handed in taking a look of things from a broader ranges of interest are true."

He declares the idea of monitoring the trend of range classifications has met with general acceptance. He added it is his main thrust that the BLM seeks to become a better landlord and trustee of public lands, including what he calls selective management of grazing allotments.

He also hopes to restrict environmental impact statements to truly protect the environment, rather than retard development.

McClure appears to have defused for a large part the emotional issue of sale of public lands by asking President Reagan to abandon such a policy.

In this, he has been joined by Rep. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, blunting what appeared a prime Democratic issue for the 1984 campaign. They are reading the signs that the majority of Idahoans want some environmental protection, and not helter-skelter public land sales.

The other two members of the Idaho delegation, Sen. Steve Symms and Rep. George Hansen, both Republicans, remain strongly anti-environmental but have shown little input interest.

Thus, much of the discussions and activities by Burford and McClure may very well reflect what may happen on the national level as far as public lands are concerned for at least the remaining tenure of the Reagan administration, whether it terminates at the end of 1984 or 1988.