

The Western scene . . .

Western states still want federal lands

Sun Mar 20 1981

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

Western states still want federal lands within their borders but they differ on the types, Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, vice chairman of the House Agricultural Affairs Committee, said Friday.

Tibbitts gave this report after attending the public lands session of the Western Conference of State Government at Santa Fe, N.M. and the discussions there emphasized all of the Western states want control of federal public lands.

"The only trouble is the fact they differ on what the want," said Tibbitts, who with nine terms ties for fourth in the length of service in the Idaho Legislature.

"For example," said Tibbitts, "Idaho is interested only in the Bureau of Land Management Lands but Wyoming wants all federal lands, including Forest Service. Idaho has no quarrel with the Forest Service."

"Discussions at the conference indicates the states felt they could administer and make such BLM lands more usable than at present. Whatever revenue they get the states could use, rather than the federal government getting it all and then sending a small portion back to the states.

"We feel we could have more of a multiple use concept than at present."

Tibbitts said the Idaho Department of Lands could well administer such BLM lands, just as it does state lands under its jurisdiction.

Tibbitts said under the present arrangements the eastern interests have as much voice as the west in administering such lands. Yet the Western states have by far the largest share. In Idaho, the federal land ownership is 64 percent; in Nevada, 87 percent, and in most Western states, it's half or more.

By contrast, the federal land ownership in eastern states is not more than 7 percent in any state, and in most cases, less than 4 percent.

More than two-thirds of the public lands are located in the 13 western states.

Tibbitts said the Sagebrush Rebellion is going strong, despite what Secretary of Interior James Watt says.

Tibbitts said he expects the Sagebrush Rebellion to pick up steam again next year but acknowledged it may be several years before the movement for the states to acquire BLM lands is successful.

"In my mind there is no question the states want this land," said Tibbitts, who also is a member of the House Resources and Conservation Committee and Revenue and Taxation Committee.

He reported the "executive committee of the conference also expressed its considerable concern that Watt had seemed to have relegated the Sagebrush Rebellion to the back burner. The committee strongly requested that Watt place an increased priority on the principles of the rebellion in a resolution which called for transfer of the public lands to the states."

The committee said it wanted Watt to know that the rebellion is "alive and well" in the west and

that it expects the secretary's support of these goals in Washington.

The Western council's executive committee also directed its chairman, State Sen. Cary Peterson, of Utah, to commend Watt for his excellent administration of the nation's public

lands. The committee said it support Watt's efforts in helping strengthen the nation's economy, providing for orderly energy development so as to forestall later damaging development in a crisis atmosphere, and making natural resources



Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts

available to the people for their enjoyment and use.

It also lauded Watt for giving states and the private sector a larger role in resource management, and making wise multiple use management decisions on that matters which affect every American consumer.

Tibbitt noted Santa Fe, less than the size of Idaho Falls, is a great tourist attractions. He said its architecture is unique that almost every building is of Spanish or Mexican design, and other than cathedrals, there is no building more than three stories high.

More than 50 legislators from 13 western states were in attendance.