

# Debating wilderness



Glenn Oakley/Special to The Idaho Statesman

One of Idaho's most visible peaks, Castle Peak stands 11,815 feet in the White Clouds. The White Clouds are included in the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act.

Politicians, environmentalists and timber industry have fought for years over how much land to protect. But many Idahoans think the state has enough wilderness.

By Andrew Garber  
The Idaho Statesman

Nine million acres of pristine Idaho land — an area larger than the state of Vermont — sits in legal limbo.

The rugged National Forest land has been virtually untouched by man. It encompasses soaring mountains, roaring whitewater, a plethora of wildlife and enough trees to keep Idaho's sawmills buzzing indefinitely.

Politicians, environmentalists and timber industry officials have bickered for years over the booty. The issue: How much acreage, if any, should Congress set aside as protected wilderness and how much can the timber mills have?

Gov. Cecil Andrus, former Idaho Sen. Jim McClure and the state Legislature all have tried to resolve the debate during the past decade without success.

Idaho's congressional delegation set out again this year to

settle matters, but its effort is sputtering. Likewise, a national movement to designate wilderness in the state appears unlikely to go anywhere this year.

Why?

The general public doesn't care. People think Idaho has enough untouched land.

#### No agreement

And the people who do care — recreationists, environmentalists and the timber industry — can't agree, a real problem for politicians looking for consensus.

"If a lot of people were pushing to resolve it, it would be resolved," said John Freemuth, a political scientist and natural resource expert at Boise State University.

The U.S. National Forest Service owns 20 million acres in Idaho. Four million of those are designated wilderness. Nine million are roadless, much of it off-limits to timber and mining. The remaining 8 million acres are

## WILDERNESS DEFINED

The Wilderness Act was signed into law on Sept. 3, 1964, by President Lyndon Johnson.

The action went almost unnoticed in Idaho, although 10 percent of the 9.2 million acres of wilderness created by the law was in this state. The Idaho Daily Statesman at the time didn't mention that fact.

The act declared that wilderness "is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

A wilderness designation prohibits most of man's activities, including timber harvests. However, some are still allowed. For example, planes carrying tourists are

allowed to fly in and out of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. And ranchers can graze livestock in wilderness areas.

Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, was largely responsible for passage of the Wilderness Act.

He argued: "One would think America big enough to set aside wilderness preserves for the many of our citizens who seek to escape the incessant crowd, to search for solace in solitude amidst a sanctuary far removed from the banality of beer ads and cigarette commercials."

In the 29 years since the act was passed, more than 90 million acres of federal land has been designated wilderness, including 4 million in Idaho.

open to other uses — logging, mining, grazing and recreation.

The last piece of wilderness to be set aside was the 2.3-million acre Frank Church River of No Return wilderness, created in 1980.

Freemuth cites a 1993 statewide BSU poll that found only 20 percent of Idahoans think the

state needs more wilderness. Sixty-one percent said we have enough and 16 percent believe we have too much. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus three percent.

Even Idaho's wood product companies — which employ about 14,000 people — and environmental groups seem weary of

the topic and doubtful it can be resolved anytime soon.

"Getting a bill through Congress is as far away as ever," said Craig Gehrke, head of the Wilderness Society's office in Idaho.

#### In Congress

Here's what's going on now in Congress to create more Idaho wilderness:

■ Rep. Larry LaRocco, D-Idaho, is pushing a bill that would create an additional 1.2 million acres of wilderness in the 1st Congressional District. LaRocco said he hopes to have the bill passed by the House this year. The measure stands no chance of passing in the Senate because Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, will not support it, analysts said.

■ All four members of Idaho's congressional delegation are working on a joint measure, started in 1993, to create additional wilderness. Election year politics seem to have slowed progress on the bill. LaRocco, Idaho's only Democrat in Congress, decided to push forward with his own measure because he felt his Republican colleagues weren't moving fast enough. No timeline has been set for completion of the delegation's bill. It's uncertain how much, if any, land would be designated as wilder-

See Wilderness/4F

# Wilderness

/From 1F

ness in the measure. It appears unlikely any legislation will be introduced this year.

Fifty-seven members of the U.S. House are cosponsoring the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act. The bill would create 13 million acres of wilderness in five states. The bulk of it — about nine million acres — would be in Idaho. An environmental group, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, is pushing the legislation. It was first introduced in 1992. Mike Bater, Wild Rockies executive director, said he expects it to take at least another two years to get enough support to pass the measure. Political analysts believe Idaho's delegation could block its passage.

Idaho's timber industry agrees with Freemuth's view that wilderness doesn't top voters' list of concerns.

That's certainly true for lumber companies, said Joe Hinson, with the Intermountain Forest Industry Association.

"There was a time when we thought a wilderness bill would be helpful. But that time has long since passed," Hinson said.

Timber companies once supported designating more wilderness areas if it would release

other land on which they could harvest timber. For years, much roadless land has been off-limits to timber companies while Congress tried to decide whether to designate any of it as new wilderness.

## Endangered Species Act

But now the federal government is restricting so much non-wilderness land through the Endangered Species Act that timber companies now can't assume they will ever have access to it.

For example, in Idaho the federal government already has banned logging along miles of streams that provide habitat for threatened and endangered salmon runs.

The federal government has designated 14 species in Idaho as endangered or threatened. It is considering 25 others.

"The issue has progressed far beyond wilderness legislation," Hinson said.

Environmentalists still believe a wilderness bill is needed, but the Wilderness Society's Gehrke acknowledged "there isn't a crisis situation."

Gehrke said a wilderness bill is needed because "it's the right thing to do. There was no reason to create the Sawtooth Wilderness Area, but we're glad we did it."

Richard Smith, a dentist in Salmon who horseback rides in wilderness areas, also believes we need more land set aside.

Smith wants more wilderness because he worries the areas he now uses could become crowded with recreationists as the United States' population grows.

"Let's scatter these areas so we don't put red flags on the ones we have," he said.

Members of Idaho's Congressional delegation cited several reasons for passing a home-grown wilderness bill. The main one: If Idaho doesn't pass one, liberal congressmen on the East Coast may do it for us and that could mean trouble.

"It would have a major impact across the board for Idahoans," said Rep. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho. He fears the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Act could pass and set aside all of Idaho's remaining roadless lands. Crapo doesn't want to cut off that much access for Idaho's timber and mining industries.

Freemuth said it's possible eastern politicians could eventually force their will on Idaho. But it's also possible that other powerful federal laws, such as the Endangered Species Act have overtaken the Wilderness Act.

"Maybe wilderness is an outmoded concept," he said.

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## Wilderness is focus of UI convocation

MOSCOW — Wilderness and the role of nature in human development will be the topic of



Paul Shepard

the University of Idaho's annual Honors Convocation Friday.

Paul Shepard, professor of natural philosophy and human ecology at Pitzer College and the Claremont Graduate School, will talk on "Getting Ready for the Millennium" at 3 p.m. Friday in the Memorial Gymnasium.

At 7 p.m. Thursday, Shepard will give a talk on "The Future of Wilderness: Rethinking Human Identity" in Room 10 of the UI Forestry Building. Both sessions are free and open to the public.

Throughout his career, Shepard has focused on the role of the natural environment in the development of individuals. He especially has looked at the differences in human perception about the natural environment in different economic systems.

Shepard earned his doctoral degree in an interdisciplinary program combining conservation, landscape architecture and the history of art from Yale University in 1954. He has a master's degree from Yale, and earned his bachelor's degree in English and wildlife conservation from the University of Missouri.

He has written several books, including "The Others: Animals and Human Being," "Man in the Landscape: An Historic View of the Esthetics of Nature," "The Sacred Paw: The Bear in Nature, Myth and Literature" and "The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game."

<h3>Existing wilderness</h3> <p>Idaho has about 4 million acres of wilderness designated by Congress that encompass the rugged Salmon River country, the jagged Sawtooth Mountains and the spectacular Selway-Bitterroot region. The 2.4 million acre Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness is the largest in the lower 48 states.</p>	<h3>Idaho roadless areas</h3> <p>Idaho has 9 million acres of national forest, roadless lands that are wilderness in all but name. They stretch across several different national forests and include towering mountains and roaring whitewater. Environmental groups want the land protected from development. Timber and mining companies want much of the land left open for use.</p>	<h3>LaRocco's wilderness</h3> <p>LaRocco's measure only addresses the First Congressional District. Rep. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, has not developed a wilderness bill for the second district. LaRocco, D-Idaho, wants to designate 1.26 million acres of land in his district, including the French Creek and Peace Rock roadless areas, as wilderness.</p>	<h3>Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act</h3> <p>This bill, which has 57 co-sponsors in the U.S. House, would designate 13 million acres of roadless lands as wilderness in five states. The bulk of the new wilderness, about 9 million acres, would be in Idaho.</p>
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