

If you too are shocked that your National Wildlife Refuge System is being callously dismantled, join the hundreds of citizens expressing their outrage to President Ford. You are not alone . . .

Legislators Call for Citizen Protest

Every citizen concerned about the future of wildlife should be up in arms about the Interior Secretary's recent decision to transfer 2 million acres of our nation's finest publicly-owned wildlife preserves from the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The decision means that the Kofa Game Range, Arizona; Charles Sheldon Antelope Range, Nevada; and the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Range, Montana will no longer serve the interests of wildlife first. They will be exposed to the "multiple use" principles practiced by the BLM. This issue has raged for 18 months with miners and stockmen on the side of BLM, and conservationists favoring the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Letters Needed Now

It is imperative that you write the President today and urge him to overrule the Interior Secretary's decision to transfer these three outstanding units of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Here is the address:

President Gerald R. Ford
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

(Note: You may wish to send copies of your letter to your Congressman and Senators; such expressions are often helpful to their consideration of conservation matters.) Get your friends and local civic and social organizations to write too!

A Horrendous Precedent

At stake is far more than three magnificent wildlife preserves. This administrative maneuver sets a devastating precedent for dismantling the entire national wildlife refuge system, one of the greatest conservation achievements in the world. In the process several laws appear to be questionably circumvented or completely ignored. In short, the decision:

- permits BLM to administer the areas as units of the refuge system, setting a precedent for disposing of *any* refuge by transferring it to other agencies
- ignores the review procedures established by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)—BLM is holding "meetings" in Montana and Nevada, inviting public discussion only of its management plan, not of the merits of the decision. No meetings are even scheduled for Arizona, and apparently no environmental impact statements will be prepared
- violates the intent of Congress that our public land resources be managed by federal agencies according to their specialized missions and professional skills
- is contrary to the intent of Congress under the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act (1966), which defined and established the system, including the three wildlife ranges now being given away. The Interior Secretary's decision kicks out the Fish and Wildlife Service, but keeps the areas as units of the System under BLM management
- mocks the Wilderness Act (1964) by transferring to BLM areas already recommended to Congress as wilderness by the President—when BLM is not even mentioned in the Wilderness Act!
- and, most importantly, jeopardizes the establishment of huge National Wildlife Refuges and National Parks in Alaska.

The Alaska Connection

The implications for Alaska are grave. BLM presently administers the National Interest Lands Congress is reviewing under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and BLM is fighting tooth and nail against the dedication of these lands as either National Parks or National Wildlife Refuges. In fact, the Secretary of the Interior already caved in to BLM earlier by proposing that two such areas—the Lake Iliamna and Noatak River regions—be administered by BLM *as units of the National Wildlife Refuge System*. Obviously, this current takeover in the lower 48 states subtly sets the stage for BLM to gain permanent control over these magnificent public land areas in Alaska, as well as other existing refuges.



Fish and Wildlife Photo

Desert Bighorn Sheep depend on natural conditions for survival. Their habitat could suffer if BLM succeeds in ousting the Fish and Wildlife Service from National Wildlife Refuge System areas.

The Politics of Energy

The BLM is also "empire building" for itself, at the expense of other federal agencies, and especially at the expense of those public treasures of wildlife, fish and scenic resources such agencies as the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service manage. For while these two agencies have seen the number of their employees reduced in recent years, BLM has succeeded in adding more than 800 positions. Such additions—despite a declining economy—were achieved in order to speed up BLM's oil and coal leasing activities. The energy industry and conglomerates and multi-national corporations with energy interests would rather see the exploitation-oriented BLM gain administrative clout at the expense of more conservation-oriented agencies.

Importantly, however, the transfer decision is purely administrative. It can be overridden by either President Ford or Congress, but only if enough citizens—like you—write the letters that will let President Ford know we care about our wildlife resources and the future of our public lands in Alaska.

Legislation Introduced To Override Transfer

Members of Congress, outraged by the BLM raid on the National Wildlife Refuge System, have introduced bills to (1) reverse the transfer decision and (2) provide the National Wildlife System with statutory protection from future raids. In the U.S. Senate, Senators Lee Metcalf (D-Mont.), Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) and Robert Packwood (R-Ore.) have introduced S. 1293, intended to vest sole administrative responsibility for the Ranges in FWS. Mr. Metcalf also introduced S. 1268, an "Organic Act for the National Wildlife Refuge System," one provision of which restricts such future transfers to those approved by Congress. In his introductory remarks Senator Metcalf said:

"... Apart from the questionable legal basis for such an arbitrary decision, I was distressed that jurisdiction was awarded to an agency which is identified in the public eye with commercial use of public lands . . . I have always held the view that the Fish and Wildlife Service should be the sole administrator of the areas in question, and have so communicated my feelings to the Secretary. But I refrained from introducing remedial legislation pending an explanation from the BLM. I met with agency officials in my office on March 7 and queried them at length on the rationale for the transfer. With reluctance, I agreed to withhold introduction of legislation pending the explanatory hearings by the BLM in Montana. Assistant Secretary Jack Horton later confirmed that formal approval of the proposed shift would also await completion of the hearings.

"I have since learned from several sources that Fish and Wildlife personnel on the Russell Range have been given two weeks by BLM to either transfer to the latter agency or leave the area. The ultimatum adds to my uneasy feeling that the decision is final, no matter what transpires at the Montana hearings. I thus feel compelled to introduce restraining legislation in spite of our tentative agreement.

"I am, therefore, introducing today a bill which would, first, establish the Western game ranges by act of Congress rather than by their present executive decree, and second, award sole jurisdiction to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service."

In the House of Representatives Congressmen John D. Dingell (D-Mich.), Robert L. Leggett (D-Calif.) and Henry S. Reuss (D-Wisc.) have introduced H.R. 5511, which would make the Fish and Wildlife Service the primary agency in the Wildlife Range question and forbid disposal of any wildlife refuge lands without an affirmative Act of Congress. (Mr. Dingell had introduced an Organic Act, H.R. 1522, similar to Mr. Metcalf's second bill in January.) In his introductory remarks Mr. Dingell said that assignment of management responsibility to BLM was "like appointing the fox to guard the henhouse." Mr. Dingell asserted that, in his view, the Interior Department is seeking to avoid the National Environmental Policy Act processes. He further said:

"Those who say that the Bureau of Land Management can do the job of protecting fish and wildlife just as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are either naive, or ill-informed, or both! The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is our only Federal agency which has the primary mission of protecting wildlife habitat and managing it for the benefit of wildlife. While the BLM has secondary responsibilities for wildlife, it also has other conflicting missions, such as mining, logging, livestock grazing, and fossil fuel development.

"When the Congress enacted the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966, it intended that wildlife refuges and ranges would be managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service, not by other agencies with these built-in conflicts. Secretary Morton's proposal is an obvious attempt to subvert this act.

"If we let this proposed pattern of administrative nonresponsibility go unchallenged, no unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System or National Park System is safe from administrative transfer to another for 'management.' If this proposed transfer is left unchallenged, the intent and will of the Congress thus will be subverted or ignored."

Call for National Citizen Campaign

Senator Metcalf and Congressman Dingell, supporters and defenders of wildlife programs throughout their long careers, have called for a nationwide campaign to reverse this ill-conceived plan. "We need all the help we can get," said Mr. Dingell, "to enact legislation to protect our National Wildlife Refuge System from periodic raids upon it. I ask concerned people everywhere to urge their elected representatives in the House and Senate to join with me and Mr. Leggett and Mr. Reuss and Senators Metcalf, Mansfield and Packwood in this important effort on behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge System."

The Wilderness Society
1901 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Printed on Recycled Paper

FLASH!!!

As we go to press, the Public Land Order transferring the Kofa Game Range to BLM has been signed by Secretary Morton. But this administrative decision can be overruled by President Ford or Congress. This adds impetus to the importance of your writing to express your outrage—see column one, and write today.

New York Times

Whose Public Lands?

Conservationists are rightly aroused by the Interior Department's decision to give exclusive control of three of the country's major wildlife ranges to the Bureau of Land Management. Their concern is warranted enough for Congress to step in if President Ford does not reverse Secretary Morton's deplorable action.

The issue is extremely simple. The Fish and Wildlife Service, which has had joint jurisdiction with the B.L.M. over these areas, has been conscientiously trying to fulfill its duty to protect the wild animal life of the Kofa Game Range in Arizona, the Charles Sheldon Antelope Range in Nevada and the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Range in Montana. It has resisted overgrazing of the land and destructive mining claims.

The B.L.M., by contrast, has historically concentrated on protecting the interests of livestock grazers and mining interests, with only secondary concern for watershed, wildlife and recreational values. Inevitably the two agencies have been in conflict—notably on such matters as the bureau's plans to destroy the sagebrush of the antelope range by spraying it with herbicides and to confine livestock with extensive fencing, regardless of harm to the wildlife of the area.

The unnatural administrative yoking of the two agencies should no doubt be ended—but the Secretary wants to do that in precisely the wrong way. B.L.M. is already in control of the vast bulk of public lands, as it was intended to be.

But there is no justification for turning over to it the administration of ranges specifically established for the protection of animals that depend on undisturbed environments—among them the desert bighorn sheep, the pronghorn antelope and a variety of raptors. These ranges, which are their habitat, represent less than one-half of 1 per cent of the public lands. They should be assigned to Fish and Wildlife, to which a fourth game range, in Arizona, has in fact been transferred.

The only purpose in Mr. Morton's move is to accommodate the stock and mining interests which have already been overprotected by an indulgent government at the expense of the common heritage. Congress should say no.

©1975 by The New York Times Company.
Reprinted by permission.