

TENNESSEE CITIZENS for WILDERNESS PLANNING

Newsletter No. 206

August 9, 1995

#####

ACTION CALL OF EXTREME URGENCY

If Congress proceeds on its present path, National Park System units and other public lands of major significance to us personally and to the nation are in severe danger of being closed, deauthorized, sold, or exploited. For example, the Obed National Wild & Scenic River is **right near the top of some of the scenarios !**

We are sending you this one-issue action call in lieu of a regular Newsletter because we need a veritable outpouring of action from every one of you (and from your friends) if we are to derail the insidious strategies that would otherwise result in the loss of protection to some of our country's most precious lands and waters.

These Congressional strategies are all designed to hide from the public (through the budgeting and appropriations processes, etc.) what would otherwise be extremely unpopular end results that would most likely not be enacted if considered in the light of day on their own merit. We summarize these strategies first, then provide a few more details on each one. At the end are action suggestions which we hope very much you will act on.

Congressional strategies (summary)

1. Asset sales.

Moves are under way to include sales of federal assets in the budgeting process – something that has been forbidden until now. Under this provision, any federal lands, minerals, etc., could be sold to offset the deficit.

2. Appropriations.

If appropriations bills were to accord with the Budget Resolution, this would result in draconian reductions that could force the already severely underfunded National Park Service (NPS) to close about 200 units of the System (the Obed is on that list of possibles).

3. Park closure commission.

HR 260 would create an unelected, politically appointed, commission (analogous to the recent military-base-closure commission) that would recommend closures of Park System units, shielding Congress from accountability.

Additional points

1. What is prompting the rules change concerning ASSET SALES is a desire by certain members of Congress to service the oil industry, which has long wanted to get its hands on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). These members rationalize the rules change on the basis that oil & gas leasing revenues could then be counted toward deficit reduction. However, once the rule is changed, ~~any~~ of our public lands could be sold in the name of deficit reduction -- national parks, national forests, wild & scenic rivers, wildlife refuges. **SELLING OFF OUR NATION'S HERITAGE PERMANENTLY IS NOT THE WAY TO BALANCE THE BUDGET!**

Folding the asset sales provision -- a single sentence -- into hundreds of pages pertaining to the budget reconciliation process is an especially insidious strategy for sneaking something past the public. Moreover, the Budget Resolution is not a law signed by the President and cannot be vetoed; it directs the appropriation committees to make those changes in the laws that are necessary to raise the revenues specified in the Resolution. The rules of the budget process limit debate and limit the ability to weed out individual items.

Some points about the Coastal Plain of ANWR:

It is "America's Serengeti" an essential breeding ground for huge numbers of mammals and birds.

Over 90% of our Arctic coast, and 100% of the Arctic Outer Continental Shelf are *already* open for oil exploration and development.

The projected \$1.4 billion leasing revenue would pay for only 0.2% of the budget gap, and is significantly less than the cost of a single B-2 bomber (\$2.2 billion).

Ending just four of the federal subsidies presently received by the oil & gas industry would raise a considerable multiple of this amount.

2. Major cuts in NPS appropriations

While appropriations bills are still incomplete, the Budget Resolution proposes to cut NPS operating funds by 10% initially, then freeze the level over the 7-year "glidepath," amounting to an almost 40% reduction for the already severely underbudgeted NPS. The initial 10% cut would save only 0.0066% of the federal budget -- hardly enough to correct the deficit, but more than enough to force numerous park closures. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt has generated a list of 198 lowest-budget National Park System units that would be candidates for closure if the appropriations cuts are enacted. The list includes the **Obed WSR**, Cumberland Gap NHP, and many others that you may know and love (Gauley NRA, Cedar Breaks NM,

Muir Woods NM, Congaree Swamp NM, Stones River NB, Arches NP, Canyon de Chelly NM, Cumberland Island NS, etc., etc.).

Even from a purely economic point of view, closing parks due to grossly insufficient budgets is very shortsighted; thus, the current \$1.5 billion NPS budget is estimated to contribute well over \$8 billion to local economies. There are alternative ways of raising revenues for the System; e.g., making park concessionaires pay at a fair market rate instead of contributing only 2.7% of their gross revenues to the parks within which they make their big profits.

3. Park closure commission

H.R. 260, which was approved 32:8 by the House Resources Committee in May, creates a commission whose sole purpose is to develop a list of park units (or portions of park units) to be closed. From a total of 368 units of the National Park System, the committee exempted 54 that have the word "park" in their title (e.g., Yellowstone, Yosemite, Smokies) -- a move calculated to dull the opposition to H.R. 260. This leaves 314 units on the chopping block: national monuments, national wild & scenic rivers (e.g., the Obed WSR), national recreation areas (e.g., Big South Fork NRR), national historical parks (e.g., Cumberland Gap NHP), national seashores (e.g., Cumberland Island NS), etc., etc.

The national park idea (preservation of significant public lands and waters for all people, forever) has been hailed as "America's greatest invention," and has been one of the finest contributions our country has made to world civilization. Should these lands be placed into the hands of a few special interests? The excuse, of course, is deficit reduction. But while deficit reduction is usually justified in terms of reducing financial burdens on our children and grandchildren, park closures would forever deprive these same children and grandchildren of their natural and cultural heritage.

Each unit that was added to the System with NPS recommendation has had to meet stringent criteria of national significance, suitability, and feasibility. The few units that have been added by Congress as "pork-barrel" projects -- without NPS recommendation -- could be removed by existing mechanisms, without the new layer of bureaucracy of a park-closure commission.

Poll after poll has shown that Americans love their national parks, want them protected (and not closed), and are willing to pay for them. The commission is a way for Congress to expedite parklands disposal while avoiding the blame for specific closure recommendations.

4. Additional examples of the war on the national parks (For more info. call Don Barger, National Parks & Conservation Assoc., 615-494-7008).

Crippling of parkland acquisition by cutting acquisition funds by 88% (!) from the already low FY1995 level

Functional closure of the Mojave National Park by providing NPS only \$1 for its management
Stymieing of meaningful concessions reform and proposing to allow concessionaires to own concession facilities

Facilitating construction of new highways through Utah and Alaska parks (e.g., Zion, Denali)

Shrinking the Shenandoah NP from 521,000 authorized acres to 196,000

Failure to protect Yellowstone's buffalo herds, wolf restoration, and geothermal resources.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

A massive outpouring of public sentiment is needed to let Congress know that the war on our public lands is abhorrent to the American public. Time is of the essence.

1. Send letters to Senators and Representatives (addresses below), opposing the Congressional strategies summarized on p.1, with any particulars you care to add. It is important to mention specific areas you feel strong about -- **especially the Obed WSR, of course.**
2. Attend one of the "letter-writing socials" scheduled as follows in Oak Ridge.
Wednesday, Aug. 23, 7 p.m.
Thursday, Aug. 24, 7 p.m.
Both in Room 104, First Presbyterian Church (Social Bldg.), 1051 Oak Ridge Turnpike.
Refreshments will be available. For further info, call Jenny Freeman, 482-5980.
If you live elsewhere, organize a "letter-writing social" on your own (e.g., invite friends to your house).
3. Write to the editor of your paper, or any major paper in your state, asking him/her to publish the letter you sent to your Congressional delegation.
4. Spread the word to any organization you belong to. You are welcome to reproduce this mailing if you wish. Spread the word through the internet, if you have the means to do so.
5. Arrange to meet your Senators/Representatives while they are home for the recess.

Addresses:

Senator Bill Frist
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3344

Senator Fred Thompson
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-4944

The Hon. _____*
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
202-224-3121 (Switchboard)

* In Tennessee:

J. Quillen (1st Distr.)

J. Duncan, Jr. (2nd Distr.)

Zach Wamp (3rd Distr.)

Van Hilleary (4th Distr.)

Bob Clement (5th Distr.)

Bart Gordon (6th Distr.)

Ed Bryant (7th Distr.)

John Tanner (8th Distr.)

Harold Ford (9th Distr.)

In other states: Insert name of your Rep., but use same address and switchboard number.
For your senators, use Senate address above. If you don't know their phone, call switchboard number listed under Representatives