

HAS CONGRESS GONE MAD?

A dangerous bill sneaks in under the radar. By Michael J. Coffman, Ph.D.

Many voters were shocked when Congress passed the nearly one trillion dollar, 1,100-page stimulus bill in February without even reading it. Worse, as the bill's details were ferreted out, it produced a shockwave on Wall Street, sending the Dow Jones to a 12-year low. The law could arguably cause irreparable harm to the free market system that has

made the United States the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the history of mankind. As if that is not bad enough, it is now apparent the stimulus bill is merely the first of a nation-rocking avalanche of bills coming out of Congress in rapid-fire succession, many of which seriously endanger national security, not to mention your pocketbook.

One of these is the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. It is another thousand-plus-page bill that would not only devastate tens of thousands of western resource users, but would dramatically compromise national security. The act is comprised of nearly 160 separate former public lands, water and natural resource bills that were combined and steamrolled through the Senate by Harry Reid on January 12—without allowing any discussion or amendments. Yet, the vote was 73 to 21.

The House attempted the same fast-track tactic on March 11, but it failed by two votes. That does not mean it is dead, just delayed, giving the people some breathing room.

The Omnibus Public Land Management Act is not all bad. For instance, the Owyhee Public Land Management provision represents a hard-fought victory for the citizens of Owyhee County, Idaho. It is the result of forcing the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to obey the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 and coordinate its management plans with the county's own Resource Management Plan. In fact, Harry Reid deliberately included a lot of pet projects of various Republican senators to ensure their Yea votes. The problem arises because it also includes a host of measures that could never stand on their own merits. These will have devastating consequences.

On the downside for resource users in the West, the legislation establishes three new national park units and enlarges the boundaries of a dozen existing national park units; creates over two million acres of new wilderness areas in nine states; and adds 10 national heritage areas and 1,000 miles of national wild and scenic rivers. While wilderness areas were conceived to preserve lands previously

untouched by human hands, wilderness status is now used to block all kinds of desirable land from cattle grazing, hunting, farming, energy development, oil exploration, off-roading, and other uses. Thousands of families depending on these resources for a living will suddenly find themselves shut out.

According to Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), the National Park Service already has a maintenance backlog of \$9 billion and can-

Private property in areas targeted by the legislation can be seized virtually at will by the federal government.

not even maintain the properties it already has, much less take care of the new parklands the omnibus bill will create.

Also included in the bill is codification of the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). The NLCS consists of an incredible 26 million acres of land. This land was set aside piecemeal, mostly by the Clinton administration, but has not received formal congressional authorization. The American Land Rights Association warns that, "Gradually these areas will be turned into parks with traditional uses strangled and roads cut off. Private property owners and inholders in the areas can say 'so long' to their property rights." Inholders are private landowners who are unfortunate enough to own land surrounded by federal land.

Private property rights of all surrounding landowners are also threatened, although it is not immediately evident. Many of the bill's provisions specifically prohibit the National Park Service from using eminent domain to acquire property. The provisions also prohibit

the use of federal funds to buy private property from a willing seller. Instead, the threat to private property rights comes through the application of increasingly restrictive zoning that severely limits the extent to which property owners can develop or use their property. The Congressional Research Service warns that the National Park Service (NPS) "could exert federal control over nonfederal lands by influencing zoning and land-use planning." While this warning was made specific to National Heritage Areas, experience has shown that the NPS is not the only federal land agency that uses the tactic. While the NPS is directly prohibited from using eminent domain, Sen. Coburn warned that the giant bill contains no prohibitions on the use of eminent domain by other agencies, meaning that private property in areas targeted by the legislation can be seized virtually at will by the federal government.

Codification of the National Landscape Conservation System appears suspiciously like a major step to implementing the Wildlands Project, a plan central to the United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity. The goal was to put one-half of the United States into wilderness reserves and corridors all surrounded with buffer zones severely limiting human use. This author stopped the treaty's ratification in the U.S. Senate in 1994 by exposing its radical agenda. The Web site, www.Takingliberty.us, graphically details how implementing this plan has become a primary goal of most environmentalists and some federal agencies.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspects of the bill, says Coburn, are that it puts 1.3 trillion barrels of oil out of a total of about two trillion barrels off-limits to development; it also cuts off 9.3 trillion cubic feet of natural

gas permanently. For example, Nicolas Loris writes for the Heritage Foundation that “331 million barrels of recoverable oil and 8.8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas would be taken out of exploration in Wyoming. The total amount of energy that would be restricted is equivalent to the amount of natural gas the entire U.S. produces in 15 years.... The bill could not only restrict conventional energy resources, but it could also restrict access to oil shale in parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

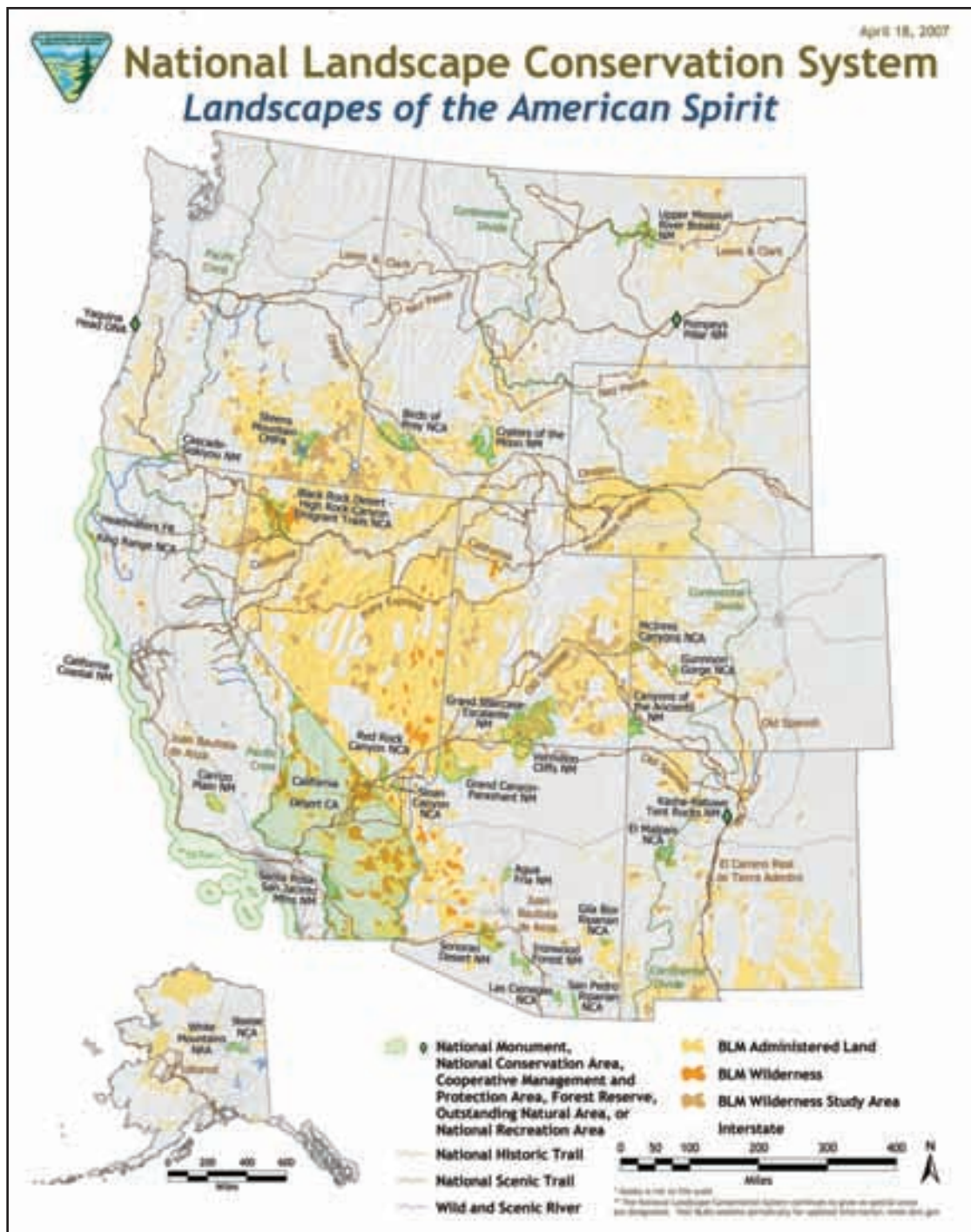
An estimated 1.2 to 1.8 trillion barrels of oil is available in Wyoming’s Green River Formation. A moderate estimate of 800 billion barrels of oil that would be recoverable from oil shale in the Green River Formation is three times greater than the proven oil reserves of Saudi Arabia.” Saudi Arabia has the largest known conventional oil deposits in the world.

In other words, this bill isn’t about jobs versus the environment. It threatens our national security in a very big way. Much verbiage has been spoken by various members of Congress about becoming more energy sufficient and not dependent on foreign oil. The United States hemorrhages three-quarters of a trillion dollars a year from its economy, much of it to countries that hate us. Our oil supply is presently highly vulnerable to major disruptions. Yet, these very same members of Congress who scream we need to be energy independent are voting for locking up forever the world’s largest supply of desperately needed oil and gas so we cannot use it. It would supply all our needs for centuries. This oil is economically available, even at today’s recession prices. We are also assured that modern technology could be used that

would minimize to acceptable limits any environmental damage. That is also true for opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska and for offshore drilling as well.

Democrats have been blasting Big Oil for not reinvesting enough of their profits into developing new sources of energy. Since the passage of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which establishes the framework for commercial leasing of oil-shale lands, Shell Oil

and other companies have invested over \$10 million in research and development. However, that reinvestment has been suspended. Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colo.) explains the answer he was given by Shell Oil: “[They] indicated a great deal of frustration. They’ve put it this way: Look, we can’t continue to invest millions and millions of dollars in this kind of research without seeing some light at the end of the tunnel.” The light he referred to was a guarantee by Congress that they



The Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 will allow the National Landscape Conservation System to impose increasing restrictions on multiple-use activities. Some say the long-term goal is to eliminate all multiple use to create the defacto national parks and wilderness areas. MAP SOURCE: BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

would actually be permitted to develop the oil. Congress keeps changing the ground rules and the environmentalists have declared all-out war.

Sen. Ken Salazar (D-Colo.) inserted a moratorium into an omnibus spending bill in 2006, and the following May he proposed a new bill that would extend the moratorium another year. Salazar's efforts have essentially pulled the rug out from under the oil companies. At his request, a bill to end the moratorium was killed in committee in the spring of 2008 along party lines, right when gasoline prices were threatening to break the \$4-a-gallon level. Salazar and the Democrats justify the moratorium by stating they just want to go slow. This is not just going slow; it has brought the process to a dead stop. By passing the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, it makes the moratorium permanent. In frustration, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) has stated: "Environmentalists [and Democrats] are very happy having us dependent on foreign oil. They're unhappy with us developing our own. What they forget to say is that shipping fuel all the way from the Middle East has a big greenhouse-gas footprint too."



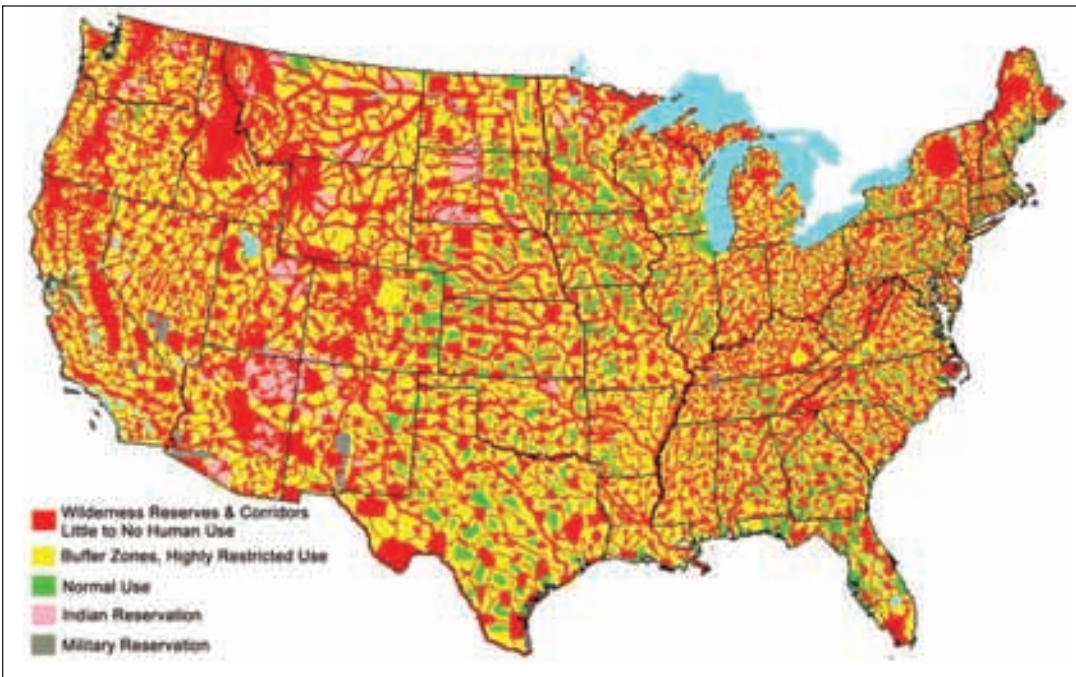
RELIEF MAP OF SHALE-OIL LOCATIONS: *The Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 will prevent the development of 1.3 trillion barrels of oil and 9.3 trillion cubic feet of natural gas permanently in shale oil and tar sands. These deposits can not only be developed economically, but can be developed using environmentally sound technology. They would make us energy independent for centuries.*
 MAP SOURCE: BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Why would Congress even consider locking up these resources when they are so desperately needed? No matter which side of the aisle a representative sits on, such a decision is irrational and borders on madness. Yet, our representatives in Washington seem more concerned about being politically correct and placating the environmental lobby than on seizing the opportunity to be energy independent and keeping energy costs low for the American people. In short, our congressional representatives are selling the taxpayers out. Since last fall it has become disgustingly obvious that Wall Street CEOs have completely lost touch with the same American people they are demanding bail them out of their own bad decisions. It is equally obvious that Congress has also lost touch with reality. By definition, that is insanity.

This madness must stop. The American people can completely replace every member of the House and one-third of the Senate in November 2010. Perhaps it would be a good idea to remind your representatives and senators of this. ■

Dr. Coffman produced a DVD, "Global Warming, Emerging Science and Understanding" (www.globalwarmingclassroom.info), specifically for middle and high-school classrooms, although it is suitable for adults as well. He lives in Maine.

FOOTNOTE: *Tragically, this bill was rammed through with only minor amendments, and signed on March 31, 2009. It's impossible to understand the blinding speed at which Obama and Congress are gutting this nation.*



WILDLANDS MAP
This map, used on the floor of the U.S. Senate in 1994 in a successful effort to stop the ratification of the United Nation's Convention on Biological Diversity, called for setting aside one-half of the United States into core wilderness reserves and corridors (red), all surrounded by buffer zones (yellow) that restrict human activities. Various governmental agencies and environmental organizations are attempting to implement this plan piecemeal. See www.takingliberty.us for more information.
 SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVES, INC.