

Our Vision, Our Values

The frightening fact is, they are not yours. By Dave Skinner



Last issue, I wrote about part of a “Not For Release Discussion Paper” that leaked from the Department of Interior concerning Secretary Ken Salazar’s “Treasured Landscapes/Great Outdoors America” scheme, as well as the juicy parts of some emails that angry western congressmen pried out of Interior. Well, the first week of August, a mangled, marked-up copy of the entire secret draft dribbled out of the deep, dark bowels of Interior, where the unwashed rabble could get their grubby paws on it.

The Big Lie

Now we know the working title of the secret memo: “Our Vision, Our Values.” It is also obvious why Ken Salazar’s Interior Department and certain enablers in Congress sent spokeswoman Celia Boddington forth to find out how much had leaked, and when she reported back that just two attachments had dribbled out, fought fang and claw to keep the rest of the memo secret.

While the administration’s spin has been, as Secretary Salazar put it, “Zero. Nada. Nothing,” and “No hidden agenda,” the very first sentence of “Our Vision, Our Values” puts the lie to the spin: “Of the 264 million acres under [Bureau of Land Management] management, some 130 to 140 million acres are worthy of consideration as treasured lands.” That’s an area “roughly equivalent in size to Colorado and Wyoming combined”—and is not the

beginning. As “Our Vision, Our Values” discusses, the BLM already has 127 million acres under restriction, with 27 million acres set aside in the National Landscape Conservation System (see “Crank Up the Orgy,” p.26), a combination of congressional and presidential actions. Another 75 million acres have been set aside administratively through planning mechanisms. Finally, on top of all that, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has designated Endangered Species Act critical habitat on 25 million acres more.

Take away 127 from 264 million, and what is left? Oh, about 137 million acres...roughly Colorado and Wyoming.

The Big Plan

“Our Vision, Our Values” is to be implemented using a three-part strategy over 25 years.

Part I is to impose additional conservation



Montana treasured landscape ©dave skinner

128,800 acres of inholdings in BLM-managed National Conservation Areas (excluding the California desert) and 283,857 acres of inholdings in BLM-managed national monuments.” Of course, inholders flogged by administrative fiat will be ready to sell their private land soon enough. Only “scattered and low-value landholdings” would be divested, traded or sold. In short, build the empire.

Part III is to manage the “consolidated and expanded landholdings at their natural scales.” Care to define natural scales? Economic and social factors are not mentioned in considering whether “land-use decisions are properly situated in their broader contexts.” Aside from these actions to protect existing BLM holdings, there is a fourth prong on this pitchfork: Wild Horse Preserves. Because BLM ground in the West is being trampled flat by unmanaged horses,

“BLM now has the opportunity to acquire preserves in the Midwest or East” as part of Treasured Landscapes, which in turn will “expand appreciation of BLM’s conservation mission to new areas.” Go ahead, “appreciate” the irony.

Overall, “Our Vision, Our Values” lays out a long-term strategy of empire building on a colossal scale, including a complete transformation of the Bureau of Land Management away from its historic multiple-use mission into the world’s largest zoo.

On consideration, perhaps a better title for “Our Vision, Our Values” would be “The End,” as in the end of public-lands grazing, the end of mineral production, the end of modern recreation, perhaps even the end of hunting and fishing. On hundreds of millions of acres of land held in trust for the use and enjoyment of the American people, the



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designation/restrictions of whatever form through planning or legislation. This includes 12.7 million acres of hoped-for outright wilderness (Congress) as well as administrative actions that could de facto “wildernize or monumentize” public lands. In short, crank the ratchet.

For Alaska and Wyoming, exempt from the Antiquities Act, “BLM therefore particularly proposes that the administration use the BLM’s land-use planning process to identify the management actions, including possible mineral withdrawals, necessary to protect sensitive resources in Wyoming and Alaska.” In short, take a page from Bruce Babbitt’s playbook and don’t wait for Congress—do an end run.

Part II is to rationalize or consolidate checkerboards, and buy important adjoining lands. Specifically mentioned are “roughly

Currently, the official line from Montana’s U.S. senators regarding the Grasslands monument is “No unwanted monument designations” (Jon Tester); and “It was wrong when Clinton did it... I oppose it... we’ve got to do whatever it takes to make sure it doesn’t [happen.]” (Max Baucus). Interior Secretary Ken Salazar himself has promised, “There will be no recommendation of national monuments in Montana unless there is significant public involvement, discussion, and debate.” Notice that “support” was omitted.... In response to the spin, Missouri River steward Ron Poertner (left) shows Matt Knox a copy of an August 1999 form letter he (and many others) received from Sen. Baucus. The letter declares “[Interior] Secretary Babbitt listened to me...and recently announced that he was withdrawing the proposal [to designate the Breaks].” In January 2000, Babbitt announced he would support “designation of the Breaks only if there is widespread and regional support.” But despite the promises, and over widespread and regional opposition, on Jan. 17, 2001, President Bill Clinton declared the Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument.

Missouri River Stewards chairman Matt Knox warns, “That memo they tried to hide makes it darn clear to us what Secretary Salazar plans to do. It’s starting to feel like rural cleansing—\$24 million in taxpayer money to make us all disappear from the Breaks.” Ron Poertner adds: “Babbitt taught us all a hard lesson on the difference between words and deeds. Truth is no impediment to what politicians will say to advance their agenda.”

Don’t worry, be happy!



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On Montana's Judith River, the PN Ranch shown here is one of "a small number of very large privately owned ranches with river frontage" specifically targeted by BLM. Eliminating those pesky cowboys from this Treasured Landscape through "high priority land-rationalization efforts" in the Breaks is expected to cost \$24 million for 80,000 acres. From the entire West? Priceless.

end. That's not an American vision exemplifying American values, is it?

It's Not Over

Clearly, given the blather of the punditocracy in the wake of the 2006 and 2008 "DOI_Politics" [see "Move Over, Bruce Babbitt: Unmasking Ken Salazar's Interior Department Agenda," *RANGE*, Fall 2010, at www.rangemagazine.com], Congress and the president all felt they had a durable political mandate. They fully expected to be politically dominant for a long time—at least 25 years. At press time, that expectation might wind up being wrong.

Nonetheless, Interior may have hidden this memo long enough to succeed. The comment deadline on America's Great Outdoors/Treasured Landscapes "listening sessions" closed Sept. 6, 2010. By the time you read this, Congress may have voted to fully fund The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) forever, something that will make Bruce Babbitt and President Clinton's lame-duck orgy of new monuments in the late '90s seem insignificant. Could a different Congress defund LWCF? Not over President Obama's veto.

Whatever happens, "Our Vision, Our Values" is a psychologically and ideologically

important document worth reading. Every American, not just cowboys, should study the language structure and phrasing. Doing so will help readers to understand the imperial mindset of those President Obama picked to run the federal land-management agencies—the utter sweep of their vision, and the values they wish to enshrine and impose upon... um, well, us.

Will they still? Will the last cowboy to leave please kick over the lantern?

Dave Skinner lives in Montana's Flathead Valley. Like most Montanans, he has more guns than money.

Crank Up the Orgy

When Secretary Babbitt and President Bill Clinton began their monument orgy, it was likely that Congress would buck at funding an expanded National Park Service. So too would Congress buck at instant full-park status for these lands. So Secretary Babbitt administratively created the National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS), a classic case of incremental politics. NLCS lands are best described as pseudo-parks in halfway sta-

tus. For example, Babbitt placed 14 of his 22 new monuments (four million acres) under BLM rule rather than having them "entrusted to the National Park Service." Land included in NLCS is a "permanently protected collection of public lands" where mineral activity is generally prohibited and motorized recreation is, um, discouraged.

Besides the monuments, NLCS is now also home for a number of National Conservation Areas, a congressional status pioneered with the 1970 designation of the King Range NCA on California's north coast.

Practically speaking, inclusion of parcels

in NLCS not incidentally enables a gradual internal shift where BLM "parkie wannabees" can transfer in while old-guard managers transfer out. It also set a one-way policy ratchet to be cranked further when the political time is ripe for full park designation—a classic incremental-politics scheme. By the way, NLCS is no longer an administrative status. In March 2009, language codifying NLCS was stuffed into Title II, Subtitle A of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act and passed into law. The sponsor? Arizona's stalwart defender of ranching, Raul Grijalva (D-Tucson).—*Dave Skinner*

Attachment 1
Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)Historic BLM Funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund
Congressional Appropriations

FY 2000s
FY2000: \$48,750,000
FY2001: \$56,670,000
FY2002: \$49,520,000
FY2003: \$33,450,000
FY2004: \$18,600,000
FY2005: \$9,850,000
FY2006: \$8,622,000
FY2007: \$8,634,000
FY2008: \$8,939,336
FY2009: \$14,775,000

Future Anticipated BLM Funding Needs from the Land and Water Conservation Fund

FY 2010s
FY 2010: \$25,029,000 (President's Budget Request)
FY 2011: \$32,479,000 (President's Budget Request) ¹
FY 2012: \$60,000,000 +
FY 2013: \$75,000,000 +
FY 2014: \$75,000,000 +
FY 2015: \$75,000,000 +
FY 2016: \$75,000,000 +
FY 2017: \$75,000,000 +
FY 2018: \$75,000,000 +
FY 2019: \$75,000,000 +
FY 2020: \$75,000,000 +

Tentative

Overall, “Our Vision, Our Values” lays out a long-term strategy of empire building on a colossal scale, including a complete transformation of the Bureau of Land Management away from its historic multiple-use mission into the world’s largest zoo.

An Epic Jackpot

Central to Treasured Landscapes’ three-phase, 25-year plan, is Part II, the money needed for the envisioned trades and buyouts that would enable a “consolidated and expanded” federal empire.

The table shown here is from page 11 of the secret memo. As you can see, Interior plans on \$75 million for land acquisition, every year, a stupendous jump in funding. The secret memo therefore coyly warns, “The BLM recommends that any major funding increases be phased in over a five-year period to allow the BLM time to build capacity (e.g., hiring staff, developing partnerships, and processing requisitions) in order to accomplish the increased workload.”

Where will this loot come from? The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which was established in 1964 to build cost-shared outdoor recreation facilities and buy land for public recreation, using offshore oil royalties (and “surplus land” sales, ironically)

as the funding source. The concept: The permanent drawdown of oil resources should leave a permanent recreation infrastructure for Americans.

Good idea, right? Well, like most government good ideas, first authorized with a \$100 million annual funding cap, LWCF quickly bloated, with the upper limit being set at \$900 million four years later.

Congressmen concerned about government adding to a land base it already can’t properly administer have managed to keep LWCF well under full funding, to the great angst of greens who view every dime of LWCF as their private entitlement. Here’s the hook: LWCF is set to expire in 2015, which explains the emphasis at America’s Great Outdoors events on “fully funding LWCF.” Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Max Baucus (D-MT) are co-sponsoring S-2747, which would not only mandate \$900 million (\$450 million for acquisition) in annual funding, but would also make such funding permanent.

To secure this epic jackpot, greens have purpose-built yet another front group (the

“LWCF Coalition”) to coordinate lobbying efforts for S-2747. In charge is Lesley Kane-Szyna, fresh from 17 years at Trust for Public Lands. At press time, with the current Congress and administration overreaching in so many different ways and voters so upset, it appears like S-2747’s best, possibly only, chance of passing for President Obama’s signature is in the lame-duck session after the November election.

What if it does pass? For example, at \$75 million a year and a thousand bucks an average acre, buying the 411,000 or so inholding acres mentioned in the memo would take only six years. The \$24 million needed to send Missouri Breaks’ ranchers packing: three months. The Buffalo Commons scheme: four months up to four years. The pioneers in Idaho? Two to seven years. The Green River country in Wyoming? Well, that’s \$2.3 billion right now, or 30 years—the duration of a home mortgage.

Don’t forget, the Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, and the National Park Service expect their share of the LWCF jackpot too. Forever.—*Dave Skinner*