

# CAPITOL CONSERVATION

## What Are You Doing About Pending Bills That Loom Counter To Your Interests?



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IN THIS ELECTION YEAR, THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL IS IN CHAOS. NEITHER THE ADMINISTRATION NOR THE CONGRESS IS ABLE TO ADMINISTER EFFECTIVELY, AND THE RESOURCES ARE SUFFERING FOR IT. EVEN NORMAL APPROPRIATIONS BILLS THAT ENABLE AGENCIES TO MANAGE HAVE ELUDED AGREEMENT. SOME IMPORTANT PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN PARALYZED FOR MONTHS AND ARE UNCERTAIN THROUGH THE YEAR. NOT ONLY HAS ACCORD ON THE 1996 BUDGET FOR THE FEDERAL AGENCIES BEEN STALLED, BUT THE 1997 PROCESS IS ALREADY UPON US. HOW DOES THIS DILEMMA AFFECT SPORTSMEN AND WOMEN? HOW ARE THEY RESPONDING TO IT?

Here are some insights. Each year, Congress introduces and frequently passes bills for the transfer or exchange of lands, and this year is no exception. Both the House Re-

sources Subcommittee and Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held hearings concerning the transfer of federal lands to the states. Public officials appearing before congressional committees have been treated disrespectfully, and hearings both in Washington and around the country have been loaded with proponents for change while others have been excluded. Not in the past 20 years of experience at our Institute have we seen government being conducted in this manner.

The array of bills affecting the interests of sportsmen is wide ranging. A selection of some of interest follows: **Appropriations and Spending Authority** - Two partial government shutdowns and a close call on a third has resulted in several losses such as hunting opportunities, important surveys, management of timber sale effects

on wildlife, and public visitation to the national parks; **Transfer of Bureau of Land Management Lands to the States** - Two companion bills would transfer Bureau of Land Management lands to the

states; **Forest Service and BLM Lands Commission** - This bill establishes a National Land and Resources Management Commission, which would supersede Congress and the President in deciding how Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands will be managed; **Transfer of Alaska's Tongass National Forest to the State of Alaska** - The Tongass Transfer and Transition Act, transfers ownership of the Tongass National Forest to the State of Alaska; **Sale of Oklahoma Grasslands for New Jersey Forest** - A bill introduced to sell 44,000 acres of Oklahoma grasslands to buy New Jersey and New York forest; **Public Range Lands Management Act** - This affects the vast majority of public lands in the West—national forests, Bureau of Land Management lands, and national grasslands in the Great Plains.

What are sportsmen and women doing about these and many other pending bills that loom counter to their interests? The Livestock Grazing Act drew so much heat from sportsmen's groups in New Mexico and throughout the West that Senator Domenici has made two attempts to rewrite S. 1549 to overcome their objections. So far, hunters and anglers are not fooled by provisions that guarantee access for hunting and fishing, which was never the point, but continue to be concerned about its basic provisions. On this bill in particular, the Congress has taken notice that

### APPROPRIATIONS AND SPENDING AUTHORITY

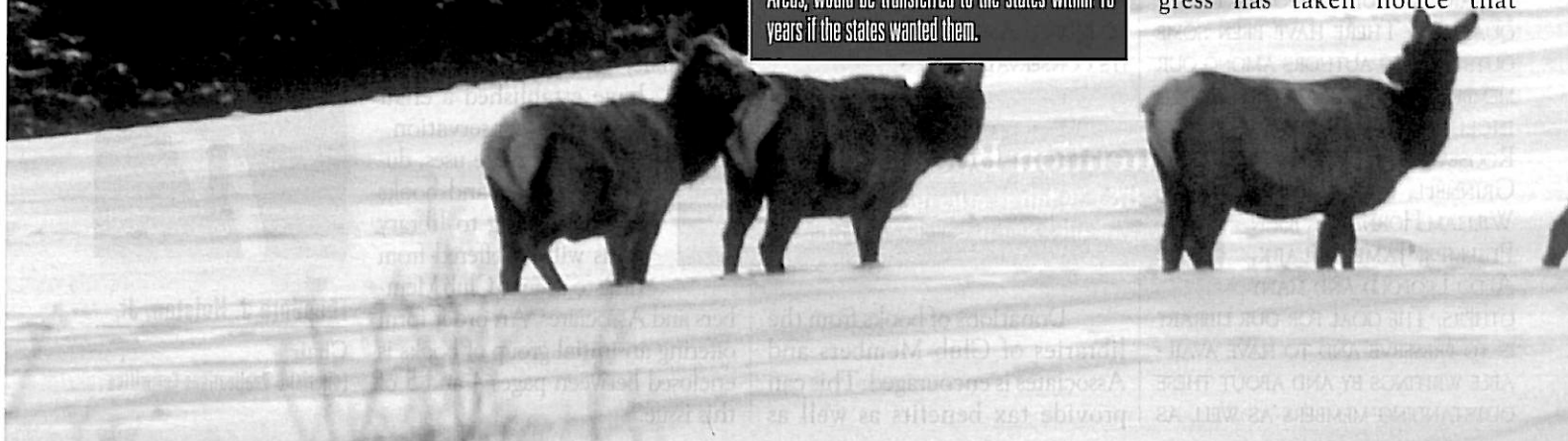
In the attempts to regain control of the federal budget, failure to reach agreement between the House, the Senate, and the President has resulted in two partial government shutdowns and a close call on a third. Hunting opportunities on some public lands, important surveys of migratory birds, management of timber sale effects on wildlife, and public visitation to the national parks were some of the losses. Cooperative projects for which sportsmen's groups were helping to pay for activities on public lands also were brought to a halt.

### FOREST SERVICE AND BLM LANDS COMMISSION

Senator Burn's (R-MT) and Senator Craig's (R-ID) bill, S. 1151, establishes a National Land and Resources Management Commission, which would supersede Congress and the President in deciding how Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands will be managed and what that land base will look like. BLM officials have referred to this bill as akin to creating a base closure commission for federal lands.

### TRANSFER OF BLM LANDS TO THE STATES

Senator Thomas' (R-WV) and Representative Hansen's (R-ID) companion bills would transfer Bureau of Land Management Lands to the states, including most rights, titles, and interests (S. 1031 and H.R. 2032). All Bureau of Land Management lands, including Wilderness Areas, would be transferred to the states within 10 years if the states wanted them.



sportsmen's groups have spoken for themselves, which cannot be written off as simply the objections of environmentalist elites.

The transfer of public lands issue is opposed on principle. Our Institute spent four weeks interviewing ranchers, outfitters and sportsmen across Wyoming in 1995, and found very little support from any of these groups for wholesale transfer of public lands. There is an interest in consolidating boundaries, but the public lands are too important to each of these constituencies for different reasons. This broad run on federal land has produced a new Washington saying, "The Democrats want to take your guns; the Republicans want to take your land."

The proposed sale of national grasslands in Oklahoma to pay for a large forest purchase in New Jersey drew the ire of sportsmen, who know that some of the best hunting for pheasants, grouse and turkeys in the West is on these national grasslands. The sale of the Oklahoma grasslands was killed in its tracks, and the sponsors moved somewhere else to find funds for the Sterling Forest.

A quote from our colleagues in the American Sportfishing Association expressed the broad feeling of sportsmen's groups about all this pending legislation: "Taken together, the proposals must be interpreted to mean the new majority believes the electorate provided a mandate to reduce the nation's commitment to environmental quality to benefit short-term American business interests. The only other read is that the

congressional leadership assumes the public simply doesn't care, or is too complacent to voice concern." Polls, of course, are revealing that the public does not want such sweeping rollback of laws.

Along with the legislation concerning divestiture of the public lands, has been the so-called

### TRANSFER TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST TO ALASKA

Representative Young's (R-AK) bill, H.R. 2413, the Tongass Transfer and Transition Act, transfers ownership of the Tongass National Forest to the State of Alaska to get the land, the State of Alaska has to pass a bill within 10 years requesting the land and stating that Alaska Native Claims will not be infringed upon and that valid existing rights will be honored.

"county supremacy movement." It is exemplified by a lawsuit launched in Nye County, Nevada, which sought to assert local control over land management by the U.S. Forest Service and other federal agencies. County officials in Nevada and elsewhere had threatened federal employees with prosecution for carrying out federal laws governing the management of public lands, and some ugly public confrontations occurred. A federal court in Nevada ruled that the federal government has the only clear title to the management authority

of the hundreds of millions of acres of public land in the West. This may reassert some sanity in the discussion about power over lands that are important to sportsmen.

The Wildlife Partners Network, in which Boone & Crockett participates, has provided timely information to wildlife groups that are speaking out more frequently and convincingly on these issues. As you will recall, the Network doesn't act as a group; it merely provides information and insight to empower each Partner organization to take effective action on issues of specific concern to them. The voices of hunters are having an important impact in counter-

### SALE OF OKLAHOMA GRASSLANDS FOR NEW JERSEY FOREST

In December, Representatives Martini (R-NJ), Pombo (R-CA) and Lucas (R-OK) introduced a bill, H.R. 2766, to sell 44,000 acres of Oklahoma grasslands to buy New Jersey and New York forest. The Black Kettle National Grasslands (30,710 acres), Rita Blanca National Grasslands (13,576 acres) and Lake Optima are to be sold for land to be included in the Sterling Forest. Hunting and fishing would be permitted on the sold lands for 20 years.

### PUBLIC RANGE LANDS MANAGEMENT ACT

Senator Domenici's (R-NM) bill, S. 1549, affects the vast majority of public lands in the West—national forests, Bureau of Land Management lands, and national grasslands in the Great Plains. Fundamental problems with this legislation include subordinating wildlife and habitat to the stability of the livestock industry, restricted citizen input, limitations on agency actions in response to rangeland problems, establishment of new private property rights on public land for livestock producers, and the possible privatization of the national grasslands.

ing inappropriate proposals. We all support reigning in the federal budget, and reducing the intrusion of government in our lives, but not in giving away the legacy for which organizations such as the Boone & Crockett Club fought hard and long.

