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Letter from Neal M. Rahm on Timber Sales in Rock Creek

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Honorable Mike Mansfield
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

April 24, 1970

Dear Senator Mansfield:

I have your letter of April 17 and the enclosure from J. George Hummel.

Enclosed is a copy of my reply of April 23, 1970, to Mr. Hummel's second request that I declare a moratorium of indefinite length on timber sales in Rock Creek.

Rock Creek is a favorite fishing stream of mine. My sons and I have enjoyed it ever since I have been in Missoula. I would not knowingly undertake or permit any activity which would impair its quality.

If I sincerely believed that a moratorium would enable us to fill a vacuum in our knowledge of how best to proceed in Rock Creek, I would not hesitate to establish one. In my opinion, however, studies during the proposed moratorium would yield a refinement of information, rather than helpful new data.

That Rock Creek is today a blue ribbon trout stream suggests that ninety years of logging within the drainage have not destroyed this quality. Logging techniques have changed again and again during the decades. Today's techniques, if anything, represent advances from those employed when sawtimber sales began 15 years ago.

At the risk of offering information with which you are fully familiar, let me describe the two "Rock Creeks."

The first, which contains most of the publicly owned portions of the blue ribbon trout stream, is chiefly within the Lolo National Forest. To many people, this is Rock Creek.
Upstream lies the second, and larger, portion of the Rock Creek watershed. It differs from the downstream segment, both in topography and use patterns. The Skalkaho Road offers access both from the Bitterroot Valley and from Philipsburg. Within it lie most of Rock Creek's main tributaries.

This 275,000-acre segment of the Deerlodge National Forest contains 58 million board feet of timber under contract, but not yet cut. The Forest's 5-year sales program calls for placing about 53 million board feet more stumpage on the market.

Although precise figures are not readily available, the ones which follow are reasonably accurate. Four sawmills within the Philipsburg Ranger District depend on the Rock Creek timber sales for about 80 percent of their raw material. These mills employ 175 men and turn out about 40 million board feet annually operating on a single-shift basis. Thus, a moratorium on timber sales in Rock Creek would soon add to the burdens of an already economically depressed area.

I know that Forest Supervisors Jack Large, of the Lolo National Forest, and Bob Lancaster, of the Deerlodge National Forest, plan to defer new timber sales until they have the information which they need to ensure good management decisions. Because this is true, I do not feel that a moratorium is needed.

My letter to Mr. Hummel points out that timber sale proposals must be advertised locally. As is customary, they also will be discussed at meetings called to acquaint the public with our timber sale plans.

Sincerely,

NEAL M. RAHM
Regional Forester

Enclosure