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Congressional Record S. 5679 - U.S. Forest Service Reorganization

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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in Montana indicating possible changes and consolidations in the regional setup of the U.S. Forest Service. Senator Metcalf and I do not like what we hear. We have not had verification, but we understand that consideration is being given to moving the regional offices from Missoula, Mont., Ogden, Utah, and Albuquerque, N. Mex., to the Denver, Colo., Federal region, including the closing of many national forest headquarters.

While we do not disagree with the effort to unify the regional setup for many national Federal programs, it is important to point out that there are exceptions. National forest activity is limited to certain areas of the Nation. Any plan to make the Forest Service conform to the Federal regional system is ridiculous. Missoula is the headquarters of region I, one of the most active of the Forest Service regions. It is centrally located and is within easy access of all the national forest headquarters. Missoula is the center of considerable administrative and research activity.

Region I is made up of the State of Montana, northern Idaho, eastern Washington, and the grasslands in North Dakota and northern South Dakota. Region I headquarters in Missoula administers 36,126,046 acres of National Forest lands. There are 16 national forests within its jurisdiction, 10 in my State, five in Idaho, and one in Washington. The vast majority of the national forests in Montana are in western Montana and if we look at a map we can see that Missoula is the logical, central location. If region I is absorbed into region II in Denver, it will be some 800 to 1,000 miles away. Region II administrates 20,000,000 acres of national forest. There are 186,000,000 acres in the entire national system of forest lands. The United States is a very large landholder and it does not seem unreasonable to ask that they continue to be administered from nine regional headquarters. Building up an even larger administrative monster in Denver, in addition to the one in Washington, D.C., is not going to simplify matters. Such action takes away more responsibility and action from local authority.

We also understand that this proposed reorganization involves a number of national forest headquarters consolidations and closures. If this is accurate, then it seems very inconsistent with what the administration would like us to believe on another front. We all know that national forest timber sales are way down, in fact below the annual allowable cut. This is due in part to an OMB enforced personnel cut. There is no way in which the Forest Service can efficiently offer timber sales without adequate personnel. To do otherwise would open up vast acreages to a rape of the timber resources.

All of this is being done at a time when the Nixon administration's Cost of Living Council indicates that they will increase temporarily the Nation's lumber supply in an effort to combat rising housing costs. The Council's recommendations reportedly will include increasing the Federal timber available for commercial harvest. How can this be done when they are reducing personnel?

The report indicates that the Council also wants to attack the railroad boxcar shortage as a contributor to high lumber prices. This is a very real problem and the Interstate Commerce Commission has through its regulatory authority, attempted to facilitate the movement of railroad boxcars with new car orders and stiff penalties. However, the administration has severely limited the ICC personnel so that they cannot hire personnel to enforce and inspect the movement of cars.

In conclusion, Mr. President, Senator Metcalf and I are very disturbed by these recurring reports. We thought we laid them to rest about a year ago. We wish to take this public opportunity to remind the current administration of the Miles City Veterans' Administration Hospital. Senator Metcalf and I will not stand by and watch a viable and effective arm of the U.S. Forest Service in Missoula, Mont., dissipated and cut up. Region I should remain in Missoula and it should remain with its present activities and jurisdiction.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record, a series of communications my colleague, Senator Metcalf, and I have received and initiated with the appropriate Federal agencies.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:


Senator Mike Mansfield,
Capitol Hill,
Washington, D.C.

Alarmed by article in today's Missoulian indicating U.S. Forest Service will close regional headquarters in Missoula, Ogden, and Albuquerque within the next 1 to 3 months and consolidate them in Denver. Plan includes consolidating offices from Great Falls and Butte to Helena as well as other involved changes. News article referred to a high-ranking Forest Service official in region 4 making the announcement at Twin Falls to the Idaho Wildlife Federation Convention. This would be a major blow to Missoula and the already disrupted Montana economy. Please refer to my letter of September 3, 1971, in regard to economic and social impacts: 1. Would you please inform me to the accuracy of this news information and any details regarding this proposal? 2. Since this is a vital matter, your assistance and cooperation to strongly oppose the closing of the Missoula regional headquarters before the proposal becomes official would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

George Lambros.

S 5679
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — SENATE


HON. EARL L. BUTZ,
Secretary, Department of Agriculture:
Hon. Jorg McGurns,
Chief, U.S. Forest Service:

Rumors have come to my attention that U.S. Forest Service region 1 headquarters now at Missoula, Mont., will be transferred to Denver. I object strongly to any such plan. Missoula is strategically located in the heart of timber resources in region. Regional concept as now established does not necessarily apply to several of our natural resources. Denver is remote on the fringe of the most active forest regions. I would like your reassurance that nothing will be done to dissipate Forest Service activity at Missoula. Any plan to move the Missoula headquarters will be met with strong opposition here in the Senate.

Regards, 
Senator MIKE MANSFIELD.

HON. EARL L. BUTZ,
Secretary, Department of Agriculture,
Washington, D.C.;
Mr. John McGurns,
Chief, Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.:

 Constituents have asked me to check a rumor that the Forest Service is considering moving its Missoula regional headquarters to Denver. Will appreciate your reassurance that this is not the case. The transfer of management from near the center of the resource to an area more than 800 miles away and on the fringe of the resource would be neither efficient nor economical and would work a very real hardship on Montanans sincerely concerned with the management of national forest resources.

LEE METCALF,
U.S. Senator.

Mr. MOSS. Mr. President, I rise to associate myself with the distinguished majority leader (Mr. MANSFIELD) in protesting the move now apparently under way in the Forest Service to reorganize its regional setup into the 10 standard offices of the standard regional concept of the Federal Government. This would mean splitting up the Intermountain regional office in Ogden, Utah, and scattering its work elsewhere in regional offices far removed from the scene of its action. Such a move would be unwise, shortsighted, and environmentally indefensible.

The Forest Service admits that it is examining all regional boundary arrangements to see if it cannot pass its regional boundary arrangements into the Federal pattern. It has not yet admitted that such action will take place, but few of us are fooled that this is not what the Nixon administration wants the Forest Service to do, and will force it to do if it can get away with it.

Mr. President, it makes little environmental or administrative sense to force the Forest Service into the regional concept straightjacket. The philosophy underlying that concept is based upon centralizing regional offices of all Federal programs into 10 urban locations. Perhaps for those Federal programs whose objective is to raise the welfare of urban residents, this concept is sound. But it is not sound for those agencies whose objective is to manage natural resources in an environmentally sound manner. The regional office should be maintained where the resources are. Ogden is in the middle of the resource area which serves Utah, southern Idaho, western Wyoming and Nevada. It is in the heart of the Intermountain national forests.

To try to administer the work in these forests from Denver, or from the Pacific coast, is unsound and unreasonable.

If we want efficiency and effectiveness in the management of our forest lands, we must administer the work close to where it is being undertaken. Effective resource management is on-the-ground management—not management a thousand miles away.

I realize that this action is being proposed because of current budget restraints, but I predict it will be proved pennywise and pound foolish so far as the future of our forests is concerned. I strongly oppose it and will do everything in my power to prevent it.