

Questions and Answers about the Federal Lands Task Force Working Group

Q. What is the Working Group and how did it come about?

A. The Idaho State Board of Land Commissioners (Land Board) appointed the original Federal Lands Task Force in 1996. The Task Force was charged with examining federal land management issues in Idaho and analyzing alternative management ideas. In July 1998 the Task Force recommended development of pilot projects to test different types of management approaches. A Working Group was then appointed, along with a coordinator, to identify the specific pilot projects.

Q. Who is on the Working Group and how were they appointed?

A. The working group is chaired by Bill Myers of Boise, an attorney who has long been involved in public lands issues. Other members are Susan Borowicz, a public school educator from Elk City; Jeff Cilek of Boise; John Foard, chairman of the Boise County Commission; Robert Maynard, a Boise attorney; Bill Mulligan, President of Three Rivers Timber, Inc. of Kamiah; Gerald Schroder, a retired campground operator from Parma who has been active in the Idaho Wildlife Federation and is a member of the Idaho Conservation League and David Whaley of Boise, President of the Idaho AFL-CIO. All the members were appointed by the Land Board to represent a wide variety of viewpoints, experience and geographical balance.

Q. Aren't these recommendations just a way to "end run" environmental laws or perhaps even assume ownership of federal lands in Idaho?

A. Absolutely not. All the pilot projects must conform to environmental statutes. There is absolutely no intention to bring about state, local or private ownership of federal lands. The Task Force recommendations are designed to offer a new approach to environmental management: management of federal lands by federal agency managers that works for all Idahoans.

- Q. Why are these new management approaches necessary?**
- A. For at least the last decade there has been much conflict surrounding the management of public lands in Idaho. It is often said that the process has reached “gridlock” with professional land managers unable to implement coherent management. This “gridlock” has had considerable adverse impact. The Task Force believes that new and innovative management approaches are worth exploring in order to break the “gridlock.”**
- Q. Why haven’t environmental groups been involved in developing these recommendations?**
- A. Environmental groups were invited to participate in the Working Group and to submit pilot projects for consideration. All Idahoans are invited now to commit on the work product. These recommendations present a rare opportunity for Idahoans, from every possible perspective on these vital issues, to work together on new and better approaches. The process will only be stronger with the participation of environmental groups.**
- Q. Isn’t it also possible that Idahoans who live and work in resource dependent communities will just see this effort as “too little, too late.” Hundreds of jobs have been lost in natural resource industries already. Will this really do any good?**
- A. Admittedly these recommendations are a modest step in the direction of new approaches to management. The Working Group members do believe the projects can help create a new atmosphere where cooperation and constructive decision-making can take place. Additionally, the proposals emphasize local involvement, a concept that most Idahoans are enthusiastic about.**
- Q. What are the next steps?**
- A. The Working Group expects that the Land Board will embark on a public comment period and will encourage a broad discussion among Idahoans of these proposals. Once public comment has been received, it is expected that the Land Board will consider formal adoption of the recommendations at its February meeting.**

Q. How will Congress be involved?

A. Assuming the Land Board decides after hearing from the public that these recommendations are worth pursuing, then legislation would have to be introduced in Congress to implement many of the recommendations. Clearly Congress will have a major say in how – and whether – these recommendations actually are implemented.

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Q/A – December 12, 2000