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IDAHO STATESMAN-BOISE, ID
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Clinton drive to preserve West ignites controversy

Gannett News Service

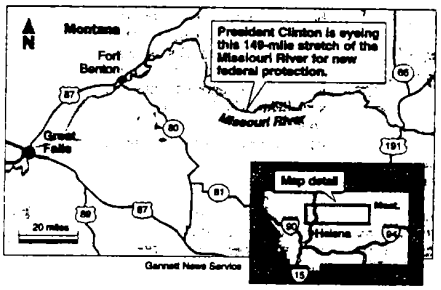
This free-flowing stretch of the Missouri River in Montana is being considered by President Clinton for federal protection.

Many see legacy-building as mere land grab

By Fredreka Schouten
Gannett News Service

FORT BENTON, Mont. — In the heart of Montana's prairie, the Missouri River cuts through a gorge adorned with shining white limestone cliffs and craggy rock outcroppings — a scene largely unchanged since explorers Lewis and Clark first plied the river in 1805.

Almost two centuries later, this last free-flowing stretch of the Missouri rides high on President Clinton's list of natural wonders ripe for protection. Already, Clinton has unilaterally protected vast tracts of the Western landscape, from stands of giant sequoias in California to a 1,500-square-mile swath of Arizona desert littered with billion-year-old rock formations and deep canyons.



And he's not finished.

At the urging of Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, Clinton is eyeing at least another seven environmentally fragile areas threatened to be engulfed by urban growth or loved to death by tourists as the West's population booms. One of these is the Great Rift country

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TWO FULL PAGES INSIDE

➤ Presidents have used Antiquities Act differently, 4A

➤ Utahns come to terms with Grand Staircase-Escalante monument, 5A

➤ Lands proposals at a glance, Page 4A

COMING TOMORROW

➤ Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt is working to build local consensus on new monuments.

Roadless areas in Idaho

Wilderness areas
Roadless areas

The light and dark areas represent a rough view of roadless forest lands in Idaho. About 12 million acres of the state's 20 million acres of national forest remain roadless. Of that, 4 million is protected as wilderness.

Roadless plan rekindles debate

Initiative keeps fight over Idaho wilderness alive

By Rocky Barker
The Idaho Statesman

The furor over President Clinton's initiative to protect roadless areas is only the latest in a 35-year battle over the fate of the last wild forests left in Idaho and the nation.

At the heart of the roadless debate is a clash of values between those who want to leave the forest alone and those who believe through logging, thinning and burning they can correct the mistakes of the past. Even more than Clinton's national monument designations, the proposal to ban road-building in 43 million acres of national forests has generated protests from Western political leaders disgusted with what they see as a top-down, closed decision-making process.

Yet the current road proposal stops short of a decisive victory for the environmental groups that had hoped to end logging on their most prized lands outside of federally protected wilderness. The current proposal merely makes permanent a road-building moratorium the U.S. Forest Service put in place in 1999.

It doesn't stop Congress from overriding Clinton's decision. But three years ago, Congress came within two votes of cutting the agency's road budget altogether.

And if the current proposal is approved as recommended, decisions on logging and motorized access would be left to local managers of national forests such as the Boise, Payette and Sawtooth here in Southwest Idaho.

"If Clinton had said he was going to protect the roadless areas until Congress acted, you wouldn't have had all this hoopla," said John Freemuth, a Boise State University political science professor.

Idaho sued earlier this year in a futile attempt to stop the

See Roads / 4A

ANDS

From 1A

surrounding Craters of the Moon National Monument in eastern Idaho.

Combined with the administration's effort to halt road building on nearly a quarter of federal forestland, Clinton's move to bestow new protection on millions of acres could emerge as his longest-lasting environmental legacy. But the president's action has ignited controversy in the West, where some conservative Republicans say it will come at the expense of rural areas already struggling to come to terms with a changing economy.

Nowhere are the battle lines more clearly drawn than in the rugged prairies of central Montana, where Babbitt is urging new federal protection for an untamed, 149-mile stretch of river known as the Missouri River Breaks. The Missouri flows past sheer cliffs and sandstone sculptures so spectacular Meriwether Lewis observed they resembled the remains of elegant buildings.

As new waves of people discover the state — which experienced a 10.5 percent population spurt in the past decade — some Montanans fear private farmland along the Missouri will give way to 20-acre "trophy ranches."

"Our new crops in Montana are lawn clippings and no-trespassing signs," lamented Eugene Johnson, a lifelong Montanan.

Johnson wants Clinton to make the section of wild river the nation's newest national monument. But ranchers like Joy Crawford, who grows wheat and barley and raises cattle and sheep on about 7,500 acres near the river, say they don't need more federal help.

"I think we've been good stewards of the land," Crawford said. "It doesn't have to be federally regulated to be kept as pristine as it is today."

J.B. Stone, a computer salesman from Whitefish, Mont., is even more blunt.

"We don't need your help," he told Babbitt recently at a crowded public meeting in Great Falls, Mont. "We don't want your help."

Babbitt, who barnstorms the West urging local communities to protect rivers like the Missouri River, said he'd prefer to see Montana's congressional delegation devise its own protection plan. But if lawmakers don't act, Babbitt is likely to recommend that Clinton use the 1906 Antiquities Act, which gives presidents unilateral authority to create national monuments, to protect the Missouri River.

That doesn't sit well with Montana Sen. Conrad Burns, a Republican.

"This is the first administration that has used the (Antiquities) Act as a hammer, and I don't like to do business like that," Burns said. "We don't have kings or emirs or sultans and potentates in this country. We have a legislative process."

Conservation legacy

The Missouri River is just one of the natural splendors of the West under consideration for protection. Others include:

➤ The Great Rift, a vast sea of lava in South-Central Idaho, where intense volcanic outbursts cracked open an 800-foot-deep gouge in the Earth's surface.

➤ About 165,000 acres in southwestern Colorado studded with the remains of dwellings, pottery and burial sites of the Anasazi, an ancient Indian civilization.

➤ Washington's Hanford Reach, a 51-mile wild stretch of the Columbia River, where hawks swoop over the river from high bluffs, and elk and coyotes roam the austere landscape.

➤ Oregon's Soda Mountain, home to 100 varieties of butterflies, considered one of the most biologically diverse areas in North America.

"This could stack up to be one of the most important years for land protection in many, many decades," said Melanie Griffin, director of land-protection programs for the Sierra Club.

Even if Clinton fails to act on the remaining sites, he already has made history.

Wielding the Antiquities Act, Clinton has placed more than 3 million acres under national monument protection. In doing so, he has transformed more public land in the lower 48 states into national monuments than any other president.

Clinton first invoked the law in 1996 to create the 1.9 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante Monument in Utah, putting the desert landscape, dotted with rust-colored canyons and limestone rock sculptures, off-limits to mining.

And this year, Clinton has been on a conservation spree, creating or expanding five national monuments. They range from the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument, a 1 million-acre swath of Arizona, to a 328,000-acre preserve in California to protect the remaining stands of some of the oldest and largest trees on Earth, the giant sequoias.

These national monuments will remain rugged and undeveloped, Babbitt said.

"These aren't places where you are going to find a ranger to give your kids a nature walk," Babbitt said of the new monuments. "You're going to approach these areas with some respect."

Idaho Sen. Larry Craig, a Republican, said Clinton's monument designations and his effort to ban road building on 43 million acres of forestland "is a very transparent attempt to create a legacy for this president in a most inappropriate way."

Craig, a vocal Clinton critic, said the president's actions won't erase the tarnish of his impeachment.

"They are desperate to change the focus," Craig said of administration officials. "History isn't going to write about the Great Rift. It's going to write about Monica."

White House officials counter that history already is on their side. More than 100 national monuments have been designated since 1906; none has been overturned by Congress. Many, like the Grand Canyon, became crown jewels of the national park system.

"If it's an end-run around Congress, it's one with stunning bipartisan historical precedent and is generally recognized as having resulted in great conservation achievements that most people in the country like," said George Frampton, who heads the White House's Council on Environmental Quality.

Changing West

In the past decade, the population of eight Western states — Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming — skyrocketed by 25.4 percent, making

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the region the fastest-growing area of the country and transforming an economy that relied heavily on logging, grazing cattle and raising crops.

In Idaho, computer-chip maker Micron Technology is the state's largest employer, with almost 10,000 on the payroll. Mining jobs in the state, meanwhile, slumped from 4,700 in 1980 to 2,600 in last year.

As Western cities prosper, pockets of the rural West wither.

About 160 miles north of Idaho's thriving capital of Boise, reduced logging on national forests has exacted its toll on Elk City, a town of about 600.

The sawmill has cut jobs. The School District that oversees the area saw its share of federal timber proceeds dwindle from $1.3 million several years ago to $225,000 this year. School officials cut hot lunches, new textbook purchases and after-school sports.

Enrollment has plummeted, too, at the town's only school. This year, 50 students attend the K-8 school, down from 120 four years ago, said Susie Borowicz, who performs triple duty as principal, kindergarten teacher and school secretary.

Next year, she expects to lose another teacher to funding cuts.

Despite the difficulties, Borowicz said she has no plans abandon rural life.

"We have a quality of life that's precious," Borowicz said. "This morning, I rode the school bus with the children, and we saw a herd of elk, and turkey and deer. Years later, these kids are going to look back and remember this as a very special time."

"We need these little pockets of rural America," Borowicz said. "If you lose this, you're going to lose what America is all about. We all can't live in big cities."

New West, new attitude

With population changes come shifts in attitudes about public land.

"Idaho's booming, and a lot of people who are moving here are conservative politically, but they are not conservative when it comes to land policy," said John Freemuth, a political scientist at Boise State University. "They might say, 'I don't want homosexuality taught in schools, but I want more open space.'"

Public opinion polls bear that out.

In Arizona, where Clinton last January created a 1-million-acre national monument, an Arizona Republic newspaper poll showed nearly 80 percent public support for his action.

In Montana, a poll by a conservation group showed 53 percent of registered voters back national monument designation for the Missouri River. And in Oregon, voters passed a ballot measure mandating the state set aside 15 percent of lottery revenues to spend, in part, on parks.

The public's clamor for open space has reached Washington, where the House on May 14 passed a sweeping, $45 billion land conservation bill that would provide money to buy land for everything from suburban soccer fields to wildlife preserves. The proposal still must pass the Senate.

Babbitt, a former Arizona governor, said he feels a sense of urgency to use this political window to protect unique places in the West.

"Public interest in these issues in the West is really palpable right now," Babbitt said recently, reflecting as he rode through Montana's rolling plains. "History says to me, 'Here is the moment.' There may not be another chance to protect and save the landscape."

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Mapping the monuments

As he wraps up his term in office, President Clinton is declaring a series of national monuments across the West to protect fragile public lands in perpetuity. Here's a look at Clinton's initiatives and what is likely to emerge in coming months.

Declared or expanded national monuments this year

1 Grand Canyon-Parashant
2 Agua Fria
3 The California Coastal*
4 Sequoia
5 Pinnacles

Recommended as national monuments

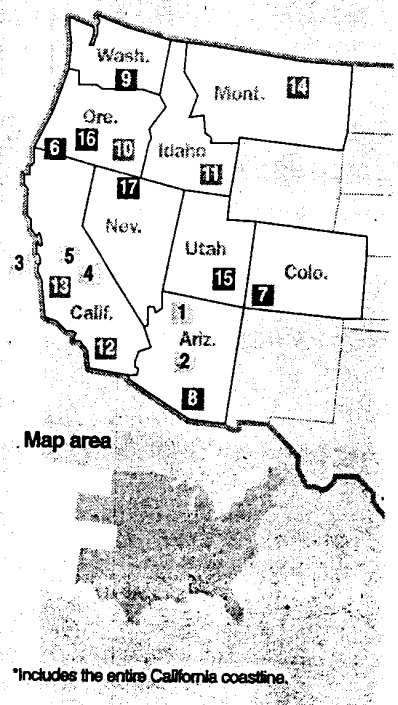
6 Cascade-Siskiyou/ Soda Mountain
7 Canyon of the Ancients
8 Ironwood Forest
9 Hanford Reach of the Columbia River

Could be declared or expanded as national monuments

10 Steens Mountain
11 Craters of the Moon/Great Rift
12 Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains
13 Carrizo Plain
14 Missouri River Breaks

Additional national monuments sought by environmentalists

15 Canyonlands
16 Pelican Butte
17 Black Rock Desert



*Includes the entire California coastline.

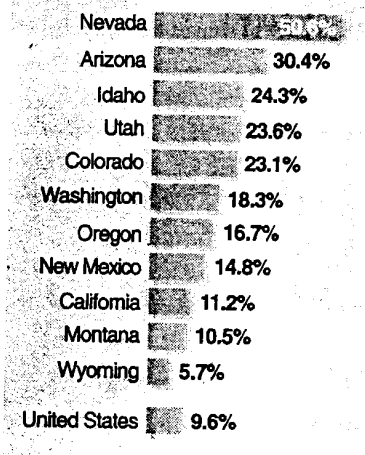
Source: Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, National Resources Defense Council.

Janet Loehrke, Gannett News Service

Population booms in the West

Western states led the nation in population growth between 1990 and 1999. With more people pouring into the region, Clinton administration officials argue now is the time to preserve the vast tracts of open land that traditionally have defined the West.

Percentage increase in Western state populations:



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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Statesman file photo

U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson of Idaho has made a commitment to obtain a wilderness designation for the Boulder-White Cloud mountains, seen here from Castle Peak. At 350,000 acres, the Boulder-White Clouds are the largest tract of Idaho's roadless acres.

ROADS

From 1A

initiative, based on the lack of information provided. The entire congressional delegation and Gov. Dirk Kempthorne have bitterly opposed it.

"They have made a mockery out of the public process, and I am confident that this proposal will be thrown out by the courts," said Republican U.S. Sen. Larry Craig of Idaho. "It will now be up to the next Congress and administration to fix legislatively what the current administration has horribly mangled."

The proposal, which goes to public hearings across Idaho and the nation this month, affects 9.2 million acres of roadless forests out of the state's 20 million acres of national forest, which account for 39 percent of the total land mass. These are the lands left after more than a century of mining, logging and ranch development in Idaho.

They provide the backdrop for many of Idaho's most scenic vistas, from the Sawtooths to the Trinity Mountains near Boise. The roadless lands also serve as some of the state's most popular recreation areas for hikers, mountain bikers, motorcyclists and snowmobilers.

Most of the headwaters of state rivers such as the Boise remain roadless, and federal studies show the waters from these pristine lands are pure and clear. These roadless lands also serve as sanctuaries for wildlife such as elk, grizzly bears, wolverines and wolves.

The scenic values of leaving land untouched — and increasingly, the attraction it holds for people — keeps alive the demand for more federally protected wilderness.

In 1964, the Wilderness Act was passed by Congress, setting aside pristine roadless lands for permanent protection from road-building, logging and motorized recreation. Today, more than 4 million acres of national forest is protected as wilderness.

But the fate of the other 9.2 million acres of roadless forest has been in limbo since then. Forest management plans completed in the 1980s directed the U.S. Forest Service to build hundreds of miles of roads into these areas. Had those plans been carried out, about 3 million acres of roadless country would have become roaded, leaving only about 6 million acres of unprotected roadless land.

Several wilderness bills proposed by Idaho leaders failed in the 1980s and early 1990s. But environmental fights over water quality and endangered species halted many timber sales and caused mill closings throughout Idaho during the 1990s. Lawsuits and appeals replaced legislation as the most effective method of halting development in Idaho's backcountry.

The reason was that scientists learned in the 1980s and 1990s about the destructive effects of road-building in steep, erosion-prone roadless areas. They also learned that roads brought more hunters deeper into the forest, removing the core preserves necessary for robust wildlife populations.

At the same time, though, they were learning how nearly a century of fire suppression and selected harvest of the largest trees in many Idaho forests left them vulnerable to huge, catastrophic fires. Foresters say thinning, logging and prescribed fire are necessary to cure this forest health problem.

Nationwide, 39 million acres of the 191 million acres of national forest land are considered in poor health, the Forest Service says. Of that total, 3.7 million acres lie in Idaho roadless areas.

"The forest health issue doesn't stop at the roadless boundary," said Dave Rittenhouse, Boise National Forest supervisor.

However, Forest Service scientists said in a review of the Upper Columbia River Basin, which includes Idaho, that managers must balance the risks of catastrophic fire with the risks to water quality and wildlife habitat. The healthiest watersheds and the best fish and wildlife habitat occur in the roadless areas, said Tom Quigley, the Forest Service scientist who headed the review.

"Science itself does not mandate the absence of roads," he said. "The science suggests that roads are correlated with potential adverse effects."

These areas also had been where the timber industry had hoped to get the wood that would keep them stable into this century. Boise Cascade continues to depend on national forest timber to keep its Emmett and Cascade mills operating.

Most of it was to come from timber sales in roadless areas. Those sales can go ahead under the current Clinton policy. But the wood would have to be carried out of the forest by helicopter.

The high cost limits helicopter logging to within a mile of existing roads, said Stefany Bales, a spokeswoman for the Intermountain Forest Association, which represents industry foresters.

That will limit the Forest Service's options for selling timber. Many sales recently have been so costly that no one bid on them.

Galen Hamilton, a Horseshoe Bend timber inspector, has been in the forest industry his whole life. He's bitter, feeling that Clinton is stopping road building for purely political reasons.

"The ideas I laughed at 10 years ago are happening right now," Hamilton said.

He has watched the mill close in Horseshoe Bend, reducing tax receipts for the school, city and county. The lost timber receipts from national forests cut into local government revenues even more.

Kempthorne said the lack of access to state lands surrounded by roadless national forests will keep Idaho from logging those lands, costing $163 million pegged for schoolchildren over the next 30 years.

Between the Boise and Payette national forests, the Forest Service predicts the roadless road ban will cause 34 to 58 timber workers, a small fraction of the total, to lose their jobs. These jobs will be in rural communities like Cascade and New Meadows that still depend on timber dollars.

Economics are important, Hamilton said. But so, too, is the health of the forest.

He watched as huge forest fires burned hundreds of thousands of acres of the Boise and Payette nationals forests in the early 1990s due to the unusually thick forest understory.

"I'm scared this policy won't allow them to get in and thin," he said. "I'm tired of seeing my forest burned up."

But even Hamilton doesn't expect the Forest Service to return to its former road-building ardor.

In 1997, Congress cut in half the program that gave trees to timber companies as payment for building roads in national forests. The Republican-dominated House came within two votes of killing the program all together.

With 380,000 miles of roads nationwide and a $10 billion backlog in maintenance, even the strongest logging supporter will have an uphill battle convincing Congress to approve substantial increases in road subsidies, says Rick Johnson, executive director of the Idaho Conservation League.

He believes Clinton's roadless initiative could compel Idaho's Republican congressional delegation to propose new wilderness bills that would keep motorized users out of some areas but ensure their access in others.

"There is already a wilderness renaissance going on in America," Johnson said. "This could finally bring it to Idaho."

But Jim Riley, executive vice president of the Idaho Forest Association disagrees.

"I don't see that," said the former Forest Service forester. "I think it drives the wedge and the gulf deeper."

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Federal land proposals at a glance

What is President Clinton doing?

President Clinton hopes to leave a legacy of protected open space across the West. One way is to designate national monuments. The second is to ban new roads in roadless national forest lands.

What is a national monument?

A national monument is an area of geologic, historic or natural significance protected by executive order of the president. It's like a national park. The biggest difference is that the president can declare a national monument without the consent of Congress. Many presidents have done so, protecting sites as diverse as Alaska forests, the Grand Canyon, a historic barge canal in Maryland and the Statue of Liberty.

While both designations are restrictive, monuments are more flexible than parks. Hunting is allowed in some monuments, for example, but it is banned in national parks except for Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt has said the goal is minimal intrusion. The new monuments will not include visitors centers or tours by rangers, which are common in national parks.

How much land is affected?

Ultimately millions of acres. The "roadless initiative," for example, could ban logging and vehicular traffic in 43 million acres of the 191 million-acre national forest system. Within the completed or pending monument designations, it's harder to know how much acreage will be involved. In California's Sequoia National Forest, for example, the new monument designation restricts activities on about 400,000 acres. But many details are still being negotiated, and the number of new monuments could be anywhere from six to more than a dozen.

What else is going on with public lands?

The latest actions follow new restrictions on snowmobiling in most national parks that will take effect by 2002. Efforts to protect endangered species also are expected to curtail some uses of land in the West.

How will the roadless proposal affect Idaho?

The current proposal bans only the building of new roads in roadless areas.

The national forest system in Idaho has 20 million acres, representing 39 percent of the land mass in the state. Of that, 9.2 million acres is designated as roadless. On most of these lands, motorized access is allowed, along with livestock grazing, hunting, hiking, camping, logging and mining. About 4 million acres more is already designated as wilderness, where logging and motorized recreation are not allowed.

Here's the breakdown by acres on each national forest:

Boise	1.1 million
Caribou-Targhee	1.5 million
Clearwater	973,000
Payette	909,000
Panhandle	823,000
Salmon-Challis	2.3 million
Nez Perce	496,000
Sawtooth	1.2 million

The Forest Service estimates 70 to 164 timber jobs statewide would be lost under the range of alternatives in its proposal.

The Idaho Department of Lands estimates it would lose access to more state lands surrounded by roadless lands. Receipts from logging on those lands go to schools in the state. The department estimates it would lose $163 million over 30 years.

How can I get more information?

➤ Copies of a 15-page summary, a 400-page proposed rule and draft environmental impact statement and maps of inventoried roadless areas are available at U.S. Forest Service offices and local libraries.

➤ A CD or printed copy can be obtained by writing to Rocky Mountain Research Station Publications Distribution, 240 W. Prospect Road, Fort Collins, CO 80526-2098. Faxed orders will be accepted at 1-800-777-5805

➤ Maps can be ordered from Carey Crist at the Boise National Forest office, 373-4203.

When and where will roadless hearings be?

➤ **Monday, June 19**
Challis, Challis Middle School Auditorium, 7-9 p.m.

➤ **Tuesday, June 20**
Salmon, Salmon Valley Community Center 7-9 p.m.
Orofino, Orofino High School, 1-10 p.m.
McCall, Payette Lakes Middle School 6-10 p.m

➤ **Wednesday, June 21**
Grangeville, Grangeville High School, time to be determined. Hearing will extend to June 22 if necessary.
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho Panhandle National Forests Headquarters, 3815 Schrieber Way, 4-7 p.m.
Idaho Falls, University Place, 2000 Science Center, 7-10 p.m.

➤ **Thursday, June 22**
Ketchum, Ketchum City Hall, 480 East Ave. N., 6:30-9:30 p.m.
Twin Falls, College of Southern Idaho, 315 Falls Ave., Taylor Administration Building, Cedar and Sage Rooms, 6:30-9:30 p.m.

➤ **Tuesday, June 27**
Lewiston, Lewiston High School Auditorium, 1-10 p.m.

➤ **Thursday, June 29**
Nampa, Nampa Civic Center, 1-5 p.m. and 6-10 p.m.

How can I comment?

Mail: USDA Forest Service CAET Attention: Roadless Proposed Rule; P.O. Box 221090, Salt Lake City, UT 84122
E-mail: roadless/ wo_ caet-slc@fs.fed.us
Fax: 1-877-703-2494

On the Net

➤ www.blm.gov
➤ http://roadless.fs.fed.us
➤ www.missouririver stewards.org

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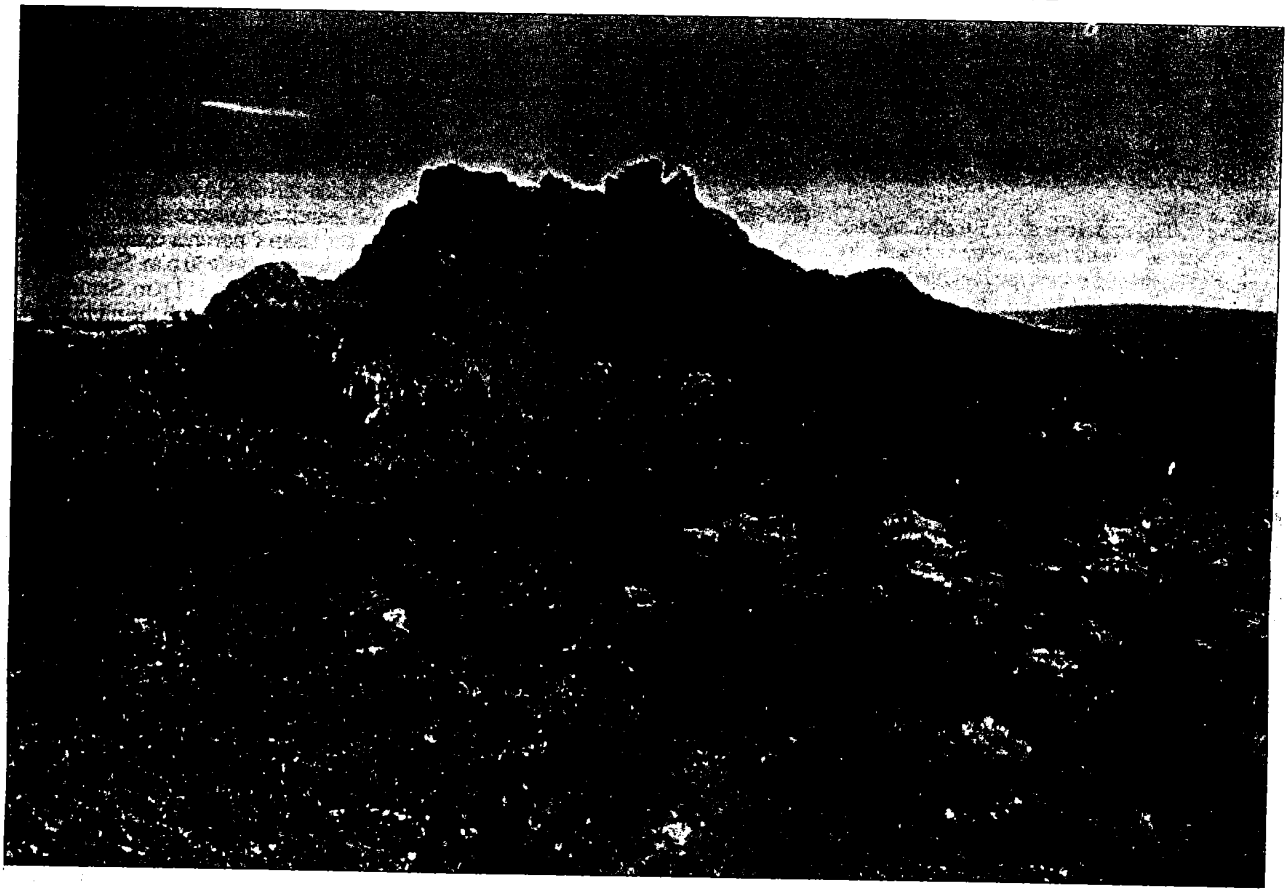
Babbitt on monumental mission to save the West's pristine places



The Associated Press

A spatter cone rises in the Kings Bowl lava field near the southern end of the Great Rift in Central Idaho. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt has proposed adding the the Great Rift area to the current Craters of the Moon National Monument.

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Interior secretary lobbies reluctant locals

Part 2 in a series. Sunday's stories looked at President Clinton's actions on land preservation in Idaho and throughout the West.

By Fredreka Schouten
Gannett News Service

GREAT FALLS, Mont. — As America's landlord, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt relentlessly travels the West, visiting spectacular canyons, gliding down free-flowing rivers and hiking through ancient Indian ruins as he confronts and cajoles Westerners to protect such gems.

Bruce Babbitt
U.S. Interior secretary

"There may not be another chance to save these places," said Babbitt, whose agency manages more than 400 million acres of public land, the bulk of it west of the Mississippi.

Nearing the end of an eight-year run as Interior secretary — a tenure marked by strenuous battles over mining and endangered species and darkened by an independent counsel investigation — the lanky Arizonan has crafted an ambitious and controversial plan to protect the West's special places, and, in doing so, may write a place for himself in history.

At Babbitt's urging, President Clinton this year wielded an almost century-old law to create or expand five national monuments across the West — from soaring cliffs along the northern rim of Arizona's Grand Canyon to rocky islands off the California coast.

And Babbitt has more on his list. In recent months, the 61-year-old has crisscrossed the country, visiting distinctive places that are threatened to be overrun by subdivisions, commercial development or tourists as more Americans pour into the West.

One day he's in Montana, urging protection of the Missouri River Breaks, a 149-mile stretch of river flowing through canyons largely unchanged since Lewis and Clark first saw the rugged landscape in 1805. The next day he's in southern Colorado, strolling among ruins of the Anasazi, an Indian civilization that vanished 1,000 years ago. The following week, he stands beneath quaking aspens in Idaho, negotiating with ranchers about the best way to protect a 2,000-year-old lava field and still allow cattle grazing.

Along the way, he disarms critics with his easygoing style and self-deprecating humor.

"I've been mixed up in this stuff my whole life," Babbitt

See Lands / 7A

INSIDE

➤ Details of Babbitt's proposal for lands near Craters of the Moon, **7A**

➤ About Bruce Babbitt, **7A**

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Protesters worried about how a new designation for the Missouri River Breaks in Montana would affect private property display their concern during a visit by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt to Lewistown, Mont, recently. Babbitt has urged federal protection for the Breaks,a 149-mile stretch of the MIssouri flowing through canyons that remain much as they were during the explorations of Lewis and Clark nearly 200 years ago. Montanans fear such protection would disrupt traditional Western lifestyles and economies.

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LANDS

From 1A

said recently, as he surveyed Montana's rolling prairies from a twin-engine airplane. "I've watched the changes that are coming in the West. We need to realize these opportunities won't be here forever."

At a recent meeting in Fort Benton, Mont., a Missouri River town where many residents are skeptical of a national monument designation and the change it could bring, Babbitt seized the chance to ease tensions.

When the town's Mayor, Rick Morris, offered Babbitt a peace medal necklace, the secretary quipped, "Is that a noose?" Laughter erupted in a room filled with ranchers, local politicians and environmentalists.

"His work style is to pull up your sleeves, sit down with people of diverse interests and come up with the best conservation solution possible," said former aide Jay Ziegler, who worked with Babbitt on flashpoint battles including the spotted owl debate in the Pacific Northwest.

By his own estimate, Babbitt spends three to four days a week on the road — driven to wrap up land protection projects from Oregon to Arizona before he leaves office Jan. 20.

His roots are deeply embedded in the Western landscape. Babbitt descends from a pioneering Arizona clan that built a fortune on cattle ranches and Indian trading posts.

Babbitt said his grandfather, whose cattle grazed right up to the rim of the Grand Canyon, opposed President Theodore Roosevelt's move in 1908 to declare the area a national monument.

But Babbitt said his ancestor's stance softened in time. It helped, he noted with a chuckle, that the family won the concession to operate the sole general store at the canyon, which became a national park in 1919.

"I think he would have understood me," Babbitt said of his grandfather.

Babbitt, who holds degrees in geology and geophysics, also intended to make his living off the land, exploiting Arizona's mineral wealth as a geologist. He has said he abandoned those plans after witnessing poverty during an internship in Bolivia.

He went to Harvard law school instead, marched in Selma, Ala., with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and worked for VISTA before returning to Arizona, where he became attorney general in 1974 and was twice elected governor.

He unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for president in 1988, then joined Clinton's Cabinet in 1993.

As the 47th secretary of the Interior, Babbitt has proved a conservationist willing to strike pragmatic bargains on thorny issues, such as the multimillion-dollar pact he forged with sugar growers, environmentalists and local politicians to clean up Florida's Everglades.

Across the country, he has made deals to end bitter battles over the Endangered Species Act, persuading developers in Southern California, for instance, to set aside land for the California gnatcatcher, a rare songbird that lives in some of the country's most valuable real estate. In exchange for creating a preserve for the bird, the agreement allows property owners to develop other tracts of land with the guarantee they will face few environmental restrictions in the future.

Some environmentalists complain Babbitt's endangered species deals, which now apply to millions of acres of land, and, in some cases, will remain in effect for 100 years, cede too much to property owners at the expense of rare plants and animals.

Supporters counter that Babbitt has revived an endangered species law that caused so much gridlock and controversy it was in danger of repeal.

He has suffered setbacks, too, failing, for instance, to reform the 1872 mining law that gives companies deeds to mineral-laden public lands for no more than $5 an acre. And he is embroiled in a class-action lawsuit over the federal government's extended mismanagement of money held in trust for Indian tribes.

But the darkest episode for Babbitt — whose smarts and Boy Scout reputation once put him on the short list for a Supreme Court nomination — came during the investigation into allegations that he had rejected an Indian casino because of contributions to Democrats and then lied about it to Congress. He was cleared of wrongdoing in October.

"It wasn't particularly pleasant," Babbitt said of the 19-month independent counsel investigation. "But it had an odd effect. It actually improved my job performance by forcing to me to focus on what really mattered."

During the probe, Babbitt dropped out of what he described as the "poisoned" atmosphere in Washington and went West.

It was on one of those forays in November 1998 — talking and drinking whiskey around a campfire near the northern rim of the Grand Canyon — that Babbitt said he worked through this notion of brandishing the 1906 Antiquities Act to protect wild areas in the West.

The law, which Clinton had first invoked in 1996 to create the nearly 2 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante Monument in Utah, gives presidents unilateral authority to offer sweeping protections to land. They traditionally have wielded the law with little or no public input.

Instead, Babbitt embarked on an extended road show to include local communities in the debate before recommending new monuments to Clinton.

In Idaho recently, where Babbitt is pushing to expand the Craters of the Moon National Monument, he huddled over a map with ranchers and agreed to the general boundaries of a monument that will preserve cattle grazing and protect a landscape so pocked and charred by lava flows and volcanic activity that it evokes an eerie moonscape. Some would say this is not an easy place to find support for such a plan, but Babbitt disagrees.

"The state is growing by leaps and bounds, and people are looking around and saying, 'What a shame it would be to destroy the very values that bring people here in the first place — the air and water and open space,'" Babbitt said.

Babbitt wants to persuade President Clinton to protect the unique fresh black lava flows and 62-mile-long rift where only 2,000 years ago molten rock poured out over the Snake River Plain.

He is considering adding about 400,000 acres of lava flows to the 54,000 acres protected in the Craters

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. the Moon National Monument.

Under the plan, grazing, hunting and predator control would continue as allowed now in the BLM-managed area. All existing private property rights would be protected, including access across federal land. Mining would be prohibited, and the land could never be sold. Vehicle traffic would be confined to designated roads and trails except for emergency and administrative use, including that of ranchers, Babbitt said.

This area would be managed by the National Park Service. The grasslands surrounding the lava rock and a 10-mile wide corridor connecting the three lava flows — about 250,000 acres — would be placed under the control of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

Cecil Andrus, a former Democratic Idaho governor and Interior secretary under President Carter, said Babbitt is taking the right approach in his state.

As a result, Andrus said, "There won't be any heartburn or rancor or shing of teeth" over the potential ument designation.

David Getches, a law professor and natural resources expert at the University of Colorado, said, "History will judge (Babbitt) rightly as one of the three great secretaries of the Interior in this nation," alongside Harold L. Ickes, who had the job for almost 13 years, and Stewart L. Udall, who served for eight years.

"He's a secretary who had a real vision and understanding of the West," Getches said of Babbitt. "He knew the job to be done."

Babbitt eschews talk of his legacy, saying that's for others to judge. Nor does he say much about his next steps in public life, only that he is likely to write and spend some time in Arizona once he leaves office.

"I really don't know what the future holds," Babbitt insisted. "I can tell you what I don't want to do," he said. "I don't want to practice law, and I don't want to be a lobbyist."

Nor is Babbitt gunning to retain his Interior post should Vice President Al Gore, the Democrat's contender for the presidency, win in November.

"he trick in politics," Babbitt said, get off the stage while the audi- is still applauding."

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Bruce E. Babbitt

Job: Interior secretary

Born: June 27, 1938, Los Angeles. Raised in Flagstaff, Ariz.

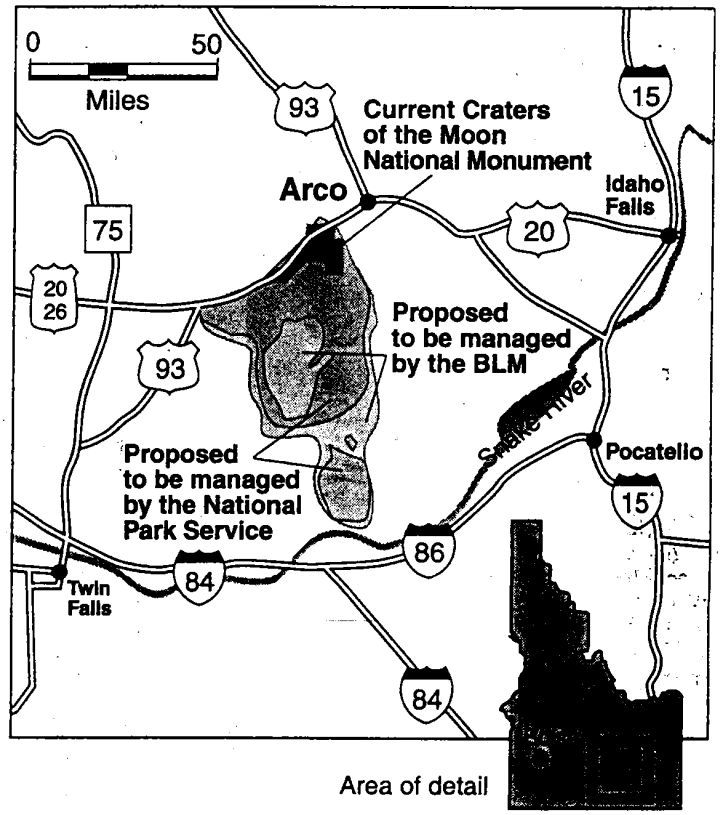
Education: University of Notre Dame, B.S., 1960; University of Newcastle, England, M.A., 1963; Harvard University, law degree, 1965.

Career: Special assistant to the director, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), 1965-67; associate attorney in private firm, 1967-74; Arizona attorney general, 1975-78; Arizona governor, 1978-87; Democratic primary contender for president, 1987-88; partner in a private law practice, 1988-92; president, League of Conservation Voters, 1992-93; interior secretary, 1993-present.

Personal: Married Harriett Coons in 1969. Two children.

Babbitt proposal

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt has proposed expanding Craters of the Moon National Monument to include two other lava fields and surrounding Bureau of Land Management land.



Monuments

What is a national monument?

A national monument is federally administered public land set aside by the president under the authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906.

Is it a national park?

No, although the National Park Service serves as administrator for most national monuments. Only Congress can establish a national park.

What does Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt want to do?

Babbitt wants to persuade President Clinton to protect the unique fresh black lava flows and 62-mile-long rift where only 2,000 years ago molten rock poured out over the Snake River Plain. He is considering adding about 400,000 acres of lava flows to the 54,000 acres protected in the Craters of the Moon National Monument.

This area would be managed by the National Park Service. The grasslands surrounding the lava rock and a 10-mile wide corridor connecting the three lava flows — about 250,000 acres — would be placed under the control of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. Only 83 square miles of the area now is included in the Craters of the Moon National Monument, created in 1924 by President Calvin Coolidge. The area attracts 225,000 visitors annually.

A second monument, under the control of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, would be designated to protect 126 square miles in Laidlaw Park, west of the current monument, along with a thin 10-mile corridor along the Great Rift connecting the three lava fields.

What limits would there be?

Under the plan, grazing, hunting and predator control would continue as allowed now in the BLM-managed area. All existing private property rights would be protected, including access across federal land. Mining would be prohibited, and the land could never be sold. Vehicle traffic would be confined to designated roads and trails except for emergency and administrative use, including that of ranchers, Babbitt said.

What makes this area special?

The primary value of Craters of the Moon and the Great Rift area is the great diversity of lava rock features in a small area. Almost all the features of basaltic volcanism are visible at the monument. Much of the volcanism of the Snake River Plain was confined to volcanic rift zones, which are concentrations of volcanic landforms and structures along a linear zone of cracks in the Earth's crust.

The Great Rift volcanic rift zone is a zone of cracks running approximately northwest to southeast across almost the entire eastern part of the Snake River Plain. The entire Great Rift is 62 miles long. Along the rift, lava flowed from fissures or vents, often in fountains shooting up into the air.

Of the more than 60 lava flows of the Craters of the Moon lava field, 20 have been dated. Their ages were found to range from about 15,000 years before the present to about 2,100 years before present. The flows were laid down in eight distinct eruptive periods that recurred on an average of every 2,000 years. On the basis of recent eruptive history, the Craters rift set is due for another eruption any time.

Will it cost money to visit?

Craters has an entrance fee of $4 per vehicle, $2 per person on bicycle, motorcycle or on foot.

For more information

www.nps.gov/crmo/
Address: Craters of the Moon, P.O. Box 29, Arco, ID 83213
Phone: 1-208-527-3257

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