

Balancing Preservation and Forestry: Public Lands Policy in British Columbia

Both Canada and the United States face difficult policy choices as they balance their timber and natural resource industries with environmental protection and the demands of indigenous peoples. The United States is in the process of a major reassessment of public lands policies, particularly in the western states. In Canada, public lands policy is much more a responsibility of the provinces. In the early-to-mid 1990s, British Columbia pursued an extremely ambitious effort to revise its public lands policy. It produced major new legislation, planning activities, and other initiatives that represent a remarkable attempt to involve the public in land management. The purpose of this research is to explore the British Columbia public lands policy initiatives, assess their likely impact on the province, and discuss the implications of the Canadian experience for the Pacific Northwest.

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For several years, westerners in the U.S. have organized "sagebrush rebellions," "wise use" movements, political campaigns, and litigation strategies aimed at increasing local control over federal lands in their states. The election of Bill Clinton in 1992 and the selection of Bruce Babbitt as Secretary of Interior in 1993 led to a flurry of legislative and administrative proposals to change public lands policy. Promises to change grazing, mining, timber, water, and wilderness policy were met with tremendous opposition, and few changes were made during the first two years of the Clinton administration.

Species like the threatened northern spotted owl are also caught in the middle of the conflict over which jobs and industries will be advantaged as a result of public lands policy and the debate between loggers who want to clear out remaining forests in order to keep the timber industry healthy for several more years and environmentalists who want to preserve the forests. The owl's primary habitat is in the national forests and Bureau of Land Management lands in California, Oregon, and Washington. It is also found in certain Douglas fir. Because of low reproductive rates and low survival, the owl is listed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is also believed to be an indicator species, since it feeds at the top of the food chain. If the owl population declines, other species in these old-growth forests may also be threatened. The National Resources Law Center held a summit meeting in Oregon in April 1993 to try and come up with a compromise. It recommended later that year the creation of a reserve system for old-growth forests that would also protect watersheds and riparian areas.

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The National Resources Law Center is a non-profit organization. The administration brought together a group of experts to study the issue. The

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