

# **PUBLIC LANDS COMMITTEE**

(Amended: 2008, Reviewed September 2017)

The Idaho Association of Counties (IAC) Public Lands Committee is responsible for all matters relating to federal and state owned public lands, including tax immunity problems, federal and state land management programs, natural resources, endangered species and all matters relating to the Native Americans residing within the state of Idaho.

## **PHILOSOPHY**

Idaho's county governments have a critical role in the planning and management of the millions of acres of federally and state owned lands within the state of Idaho. Idaho's counties have the land use planning and zoning responsibility in unincorporated areas surrounding public lands and should expect acknowledgement of local policy by public land agencies. In counties with a high percentage of public land, federal and state decisions can influence social and economic stability. In some cases, consideration of these impacts has not been satisfactory in legislation, regulation, or implementation by federal and state government. Idaho's county officials are elected to represent and express the economic, social, and environmental concerns of local citizens directly affected by public land management decisions. Policies and plans of federal and state agencies should be formed collaboratively and take into account the land use plans and policies of Idaho's counties.

## **COUNTY INVOLVEMENT**

The Idaho Association of Counties believes that in all potential actions by state and federal agencies, by Congress and the Idaho Legislature, consultation with Idaho's county elected officials is a most fundamental principle. Federal and state agencies with public lands management responsibilities should actively seek county official participation in the planning process and that involvement shall not reasonably be withheld. Historically, the socioeconomic impacts have been underestimated or ignored and has had the effect of destabilizing local economies. Community stability is of primary importance, not only morally, but also to enable the success of culturally appropriate multiple-use management practices on public lands.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Protection of the environment has increased in importance in the decision-making process at all levels of government. Idaho's county officials, representing the concerns of their constituents, are keenly aware of the rich heritage, the beauty, and the natural resources of their local environment. However, the environmental and socioeconomic issues must be considered to achieve a solution, which balances a high degree of environmental protection with the preservation and enhancement of local communities. Therefore, environmental impact statements required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) should carefully consider local economic values and concerns..

## **PUBLIC LAND**

Federal and state real property holdings should be maintained at a minimum level. Acquisition of new land by a federal or state agency should be offset with a similar relinquishment by trade or sale of public land to private ownership within the same county. If additional federal or state land acquisitions are necessary without offset, financial impact to local governmental agencies reflecting the loss of tax base must be disclosed. Since these issues are critical, the IAC supports the establishment and maintenance of the National Association of Counties (NACo) Public Lands Trust

Fund for the purpose of promoting and defending the interests of counties as they relate to federal lands.

## **NATIVE AMERICAN LAND**

IAC recognizes the status of Native Americans and their authority to govern their own people and lands. At times counties and Native Americans come into conflict because of this sovereignty and the fact that there is private ownership of lands within the confines of a reservation. IAC further recognizes that Congress has created through its inconsistent policies, uncertainty and conflict between Native Americans and state and local governments. Therefore, IAC supports the creation of a relationship with Idaho's Native American Tribes based upon respect for each party's position and an understanding of issues of mutual concern. The IAC supports the use of NACo as a forum to resolve issues and relationships between Native American Tribes and counties on a national level.

## **LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICE**

Historically, the primary goal of public lands management in the United States has been to encourage development of the natural resources. This is not only true of activities which are usually considered traditional, such as timber harvesting, mining, and grazing, but also for such activities as wildlife management, fish hatcheries, tourism and recreation. Local economies based on these principles and practices have evolved naturally over time and form a mutually beneficial relationship.

Multiple-use management, tailored to individual communities, is the primary concept by which federal and state land use decisions should continue to be made. IAC strongly supports this philosophy as the best manner to provide a wide diversity of compatible activities on both federal and state lands. Where appropriate to the local culture, this should include increased maintenance of roads to maximize utilization of public lands under the multiple-use concept and construction of new access when determined to be necessary for the multiple-use concept.

## **LONG RANGE PLANNING**

IAC supports a collaborative approach to the formulation of long-range land use plans on federally and state owned lands in Idaho. Inclusion and consultation of the local populous has been proven to improve the acceptance and implementation of the final planning product.

IAC supports the sale or transfer, at fair market value, of federal and state lands for commercial, industrial and other uses, where the sale is not in conflict with federal or state agency plans and where it is in the public interest. IAC supports the transfer of federal and state lands for the expansion of existing communities, public infrastructure, and for the development of new communities and towns.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE PROTECTION OF PUBLIC LANDS**

After extensive debate and studies, Congress has enacted comprehensive laws to govern the management and protection of the nation's public lands. These acts include the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) of 1974, and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 that amended RPA. These Acts provide for the administrative protection of public lands with unique resources, which are eligible for special use designation. These Acts require public involvement and an intergovernmental approach for the affected county governments. IAC supports this approach to the designation of all

special use areas. Before designation of any special area, public hearings must be held in the counties affected by the designation.

The IAC supports congressional or legislative designation of special use areas only when endorsed by the affected Idaho county government once studies indicate no adverse local economic impact. IAC will oppose any federal or state special use proposals when they are in conflict with officially adopted land use plans, or when a county (or counties) does not endorse the proposal.

## **GRAZING FEES**

For many counties with economies that are dependent on public lands, grazing is traditional activity that ensures local community stability. Without a secure tax revenue base, many of the essential local government functions such as county road maintenance and school funding would be threatened. Charging fees for grazing private livestock on federal lands is a long-standing, but contentious practice. Generally, livestock producers who use federal lands want to keep fees low, while conservation groups and others believe fees should be raised to approximate "fair market value." Congressional action attempting to increase grazing fees and other restrictive public lands policies has the effect of changing traditional grazing plans, and in some cases can push a marginal operation out of business. Therefore, IAC supports imposition of a grazing fee on public lands based on the formula mandated in the Public Rangeland Improvement Act (PRIA) of 1978 as fair and equitable to both the federal government and public land permittees. IAC also supports federal legislation, which would make permanent the PRIA formula for determining fees for the grazing of livestock on public rangelands.

## **COMMUNITY STABILITY**

The maintenance of community stability in natural resource dependent counties is a high priority to IAC. These counties are at the mercy of Congress, the Idaho Legislature and federal and state agencies whose policy and management decisions have a direct impact on counties.

For elected county officials, community stability encompasses a broad range of concerns for county residents whose economic, social, and environmental well-being is associated to policy decisions made regarding the disposition of the nation's natural resources. The Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR 221.3) states that the Forest Service must "provide, so far as feasible, an even flow of national forest timber in order to facilitate the stabilization of communities and of opportunities for employment." In addition, the Multiple Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 requires that all forest resources be managed on a sustained basis.

Global changes are occurring and are having a dramatic impact on the welfare of rural Idaho. The lack of economic diversity in resource dependent areas results in a serious weakness that is often beyond the capacity of counties to solve locally. The US Forest Service, other federal agencies and state government should be enlisted to provide direct economic aid, technical assistance, and expertise in helping communities diversify their economies. Shifts in federal and state policies which impact Idaho's counties should be accompanied by corresponding grants, loans, and technical assistance to help counties adapt to these changing economic realities.

The IAC supports regular updates to county officials by local public land managers to keep the community apprised of short and long term goals of the agency.