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What's Right With CIEDRA?

By Sandra Mitchell

In the July 7 editorial, the writer asks "What is the problem with CIEDRA?" It would be much easier to respond to the question, "What's right with CIEDRA?" The answer – not much!

First of all, about which Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (CIEDRA) are you talking? The House version of the bill actually contained some economic development features, such as grants and land transfers which counties could sell. It even made some attempts to appease motorized recreation and others.

The Senate version dropped most of these and is essentially a pure wilderness designation bill with a few "public purpose" land transfers or special use permit directives. Of course the special use permits could be issued without the bill and the lands reverts back to the federal government if the "public purposes" are no longer needed. Oh, and by the way, the wilderness designation in the Senate version grew by 14,000 acres; that's 22 square miles. Don't take my word for it. Compare the bills for yourself.

To his credit, Congressman Simpson has negotiated federal grants for financially stressed Custer County to the tune of some \$5,000,000 of our federal tax dollars. That's nice and he did it without the "pork for wilderness" features in his version of CIEDRA. Now if he would just do the same for other counties in our state left destitute by the collapse of our forest product industries.

Idaho already has 4.5 million acres of wilderness where human use is curtailed and nature rolls the dice for such natural forces as fire. The counties and communities adjacent to the three proposed wildernesses in CIEDRA already have the 2.3 million-acre Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness and 217,000-acre Sawtooth Wilderness in their back yards. Do they need more wildernesses where a limited number of non-motorized users can go or do they need some attractive areas where a variety of uses, such as snowmobiling and mountain biking can take place?

As for why more wildernesses are needed, we

haven't heard much in the way of reasons, other than that a few people want them. There are no threats to these lands. Most are already protected within the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. The balance is protected by the restrictive Idaho Roadless Rule and myriad of laws that have shut down virtually all extractive uses of our federal public lands.

During the recent Senate hearing on the bill, Senator Risch asked why the existing protections supplied by the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and the Idaho Roadless Rule weren't good enough? Rick Johnson, representing the Idaho Conservation League, responded: "The most significant threat to this area over the long run, which is up to administrative decision, in the future is motorized recreation."

"Wilderness designation addresses the issue of motorized and mechanized use proactively and prohibits it."

Boy, that is proactive all right, but he neglected to say what, if any, damage the limited and carefully managed motorized and mechanized use of the area is actually doing. It may not be doing any damage, but he wants it gone anyway.

Rick also told the senator just why most of the recreation and economic development features of the act agreed upon during the collaborative process in Idaho, such as it was, disappeared in the latest Washington version of the bill.

"Politics is the art of the possible," he said. "Some things don't stand the heat of the cauldron back here. There are certain parts of the bill that were created in Idaho that, quite frankly, didn't stand back here."

So much for depending on Washington to honor agreements reached through local collaboration. CIEDRA today is a gutted bill; it is simply a wilderness bill lockup hiding behind a misleading name. Governor Otter made the best choice for the people of Idaho in opposing this unneeded piece of misguided legislation. Let's hope this bill gets pulled before it's too late.

(Sandra Mitchell is public lands director for the Idaho State Snowmobile Association.)