

McMorris Rodgers says no to compromise

Jim Fisher

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Wednesday, legislation resolving a number of wilderness issues in the country, and incorporating the collaborative compromise over Idaho's Owyhee Canyonlands, was endorsed by every House member from the Northwest with only two exceptions: eastern Washington's Cathy McMorris Rodgers and Doc Hastings.

It tells you a lot when McMorris Rodgers and Hastings vote against something every Republican member of Congress from Idaho supports.

It tells you they are anything but moderates, of course. But it tells you more than that.

The Owyhee compromise, one of Republican Sen. Mike Crapo's biggest projects in the last several years, represents, as Crapo is first to say, a model for settling any number of controversies involving the use of public land. For eight years, conservationists, ranchers, Indians, local government officials and others have worked to pass legislation that gives each party enough of what they want that they consider themselves winners.

Perhaps more important than what they consider themselves, however, is what they consider those with whom they negotiated this deal. As the Idaho Statesman's Rocky Barker put it Thursday, "Environmental groups and Owyhee County ranchers went from bitter enemies to friends and partners in their ambitious effort to preserve the awesome scenery of the Owyhee Canyonlands, miles of habitat for wild sheep, imperiled sage grouse and rare redband trout, and the cultural treasures of both cowboys and Indians."

The scenery is indeed awesome, but no less so is the partnership the parties to the talks forged. Thanks to it, a state that has been stymied by wilderness standoffs for decades - standoffs that left millions of acres in virtual limbo, neither protected from nor open to many uses - has finally moved beyond ideology and bumper-sticker slogans to reach a mutual resolution built not only on compromise, but also on trust.

Part of the deal is the pledge by environmental groups to help raise at least \$10 million in private money to supplement expected tax dollars that will finance land transfers, grazing-rights retirement and other sweeteners for the ranchers in the affected region. And as rancher Brenda Richards says, "that's where the hard work is going to come."

Craig Gehrke from Idaho's office of the Wilderness Society agrees, while accepting the responsibility.

"The ranchers should be looking for us to make sure we get all these pieces together," Gehrke says. "The solicitation of the private money and the federal appropriations are going to be a tough task, but we're going to do it."

It is that kind of cooperation that led Crapo's fellow Republicans in the Idaho delegation, Sen. Jim Risch and Rep. Mike Simpson, to be early proponents of the omnibus bill that the House sent to President Obama by better than a 2-1 margin. Risch has even said a similar process might resolve the region's festering dispute over preservation of Snake River salmon runs.

If it does, though, don't look to McMorris Rodgers or Hastings to be part of the solution. They represent a different Republican Party from the one that helped make this compromise succeed.

It's the party of "No." - J.F.