

# Idaho or Obama decides - it's Risch's call

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Two paths confront Idaho's Boulder-White Cloud Range.

Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, finally could achieve his aim of passing the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act - a signature measure he's been pursuing for more than a dozen years.

Or President Barack Obama could declare the area a national monument under the 1906 Antiquities Act.

CIEDRA is the Idaho plan. Acting as an honest broker of information, Simpson worked out compromises among county officials, environmentalists, ranchers and recreationists.

It calls for 332,775 acres of wilderness, opening another 130,453 acres for multiple use, access for motorized recreation, money for trail maintenance and protection for ranchers.

Once Congress has acted, the issue is settled. No wilderness bill has ever led to protracted litigation.

But it's been stymied by political betrayal and gridlock. In 2006, he went home thinking the measure was attached to a must-pass budget bill in the closing hours of a lame duck Congress, only to have House Speaker Dennis Hastert yank it out and replace it with a self-serving measure.

In 2010, Simpson had lined up the entire Idaho congressional delegation - only to have U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, pull the rug out from under him. Since he sits on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Risch has been able to block the measure.

By contrast, a national monument ought to be everything Idahoans despise:

- It would be larger - more than 500,000 acres.
- It would be a top-down mandate, delivered by a president who is reviled in the Gem State.
- It would be both uncertain and inflexible. Once declared, it would be subject to the regulations drafted by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Even then, it would draw a decade's worth of litigation.
- No president can bind his successors. Even if the Obama administration allows motorized access in much of the area, nothing would stop the Elizabeth Warren White House from closing it down - or President Rand Paul from shrinking its size.

But if Congress can't act, the president can. Hence former Idaho Gov. Cecil D. Andrus and environmentalists now favor this approach.

With a national monument proclamation imminent, Simpson sees one last chance for leverage. He is asking the White House to give him six to eight months to deliver.

"By the end of next year, it will be a national monument or we will have passed a wilderness bill," he told the Idaho Statesman's Rocky Barker.

He also sees daylight in the fact that Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah, is set to replace retiring House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings, R-Wash., who has grounded virtually all new wilderness bills.

The problem is Risch. If anything, his opposition has hardened. In a debate with his Democratic rival Nels Mitchell earlier this month, Risch labeled CIEDRA a work product of "liberals in Washington, D.C.," a comment that left Simpson flummoxed.

Even with Simpson's budget clout - he's chairman of the Energy and Water Development appropriations subcommittee - he may not be able to out-maneuver Risch, especially if the GOP gains the Senate majority.

So if central Idaho ends up with a national monument, Obama will get the credit. But Risch deserves the blame.- M.T.