

## **Idaho panel calls for collaboration on federal land takeover**

RYAN STRUYK, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A legislative panel is urging Idaho lawmakers to pursue a collaborative approach while seeking to assume control of federally managed public land.

The committee approved sending their report to legislative leaders on Friday after two years of study. The report follows lawmakers' demand for an immediate takeover of public lands, which comprise more than 60 percent of Idaho.

The effort is backed by Republican lawmakers who believe the state could manage public lands better than the federal government.

In the report, the panel wrote that many Idaho residents "believe a government that is closer to both the people impacted by governmental decisions and the lands managed by the government would produce better results."

However, the committee is discouraging litigation as a means to acquire the land.

"Legal analysis suggests that litigation of state claims to ownership of federal lands would be a time-consuming and expensive endeavor without a great deal of certainty as to the outcome," the report says.

The two Democrats on the committee disagreed with the majority. They contend a state takeover of federal lands would be both unconstitutional and fiscally irresponsible.

"Idaho can't afford to take over those lands and maintain them, even if the federal government gave them to us, which they won't," wrote Democrats Senate Minority Leader Michelle Stennett and House Assistant Minority Leader Mat Erpelding.

However, the Republican-controlled panel said that more efficient management, along with taxes on the land's new economic development, would be enough to sustain the land in the long run.

Still, no specific legislation has been presented, and it's unclear how much funding the legislature would devote to the state's federal land takeover efforts.

GOP lawmakers also wrote that wildfires have increased while the federal government has been in control of the lands. They also say that the state's logging industry has suffered because of the federal oversight.

But Democrats worry that, if Idaho can't financially sustain the lands, they will be forced to sell it.

"Idahoans do not want to lose access to public lands regardless of whether they are managed by federal agencies or by the state," the panel's report says.

Committee chairman and Republican Sen. Chuck Winder of Boise said the committee's report doesn't have all the answers and that he expects lawmakers to continue working on the issue.

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