

## Idaho governor wants more say in species protection ideas

By KEITH RIDLER, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Federal agencies need to do a better job considering state and local ideas when it comes to making decisions about species facing possible extinction, Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter said Tuesday.

"Being part of the process, being part of the solution, and being seriously considered with our ideas is what matters and will continue to matter," Otter said in Boise at a Western Governors' Association workshop intended to find a way to give states a stronger say in Endangered Species Act decisions.

Panelists at the Species Conservation and Endangered Species Act Initiative included representatives from conservation groups, extractive industries, scientists, and federal and state agencies. They discussed voluntary conservation efforts, incentives for private land owners, best available science and critical habitat designation.

A previous workshop for the 19-state association was held in Wyoming in November, and several more workshops are planned.

"Even though we deal with a lot of frustration in this federal vs. state, federal vs. local game, there are some successes," Otter said.

He noted in particular salmon and steelhead in the upper Salmon River in central Idaho. But he also made it clear he's still perturbed with federal agencies that discarded Idaho's plan for protecting sage grouse habitat but announced new restrictions in September while declaring the bird didn't require federal protections.

"It meant a whole different management of the landscape that is, and should be, unacceptable," he said.

Idaho shortly after the announcement filed a lawsuit over the restrictions on mining, energy development and grazing that are intended to protect sage grouse across millions of acres of the American West.

Virgil Moore, director of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, said he's noticed that everyone has their biases concerning species protections, and for animals that occupy a larger range, "the more charismatic it is, the more difficulty we have overcoming those biases."

Some panelists were also concerned that the best available science isn't always reliable.

Ann Forest Burns of the American Forest Resource Council, which represents the forest products industry, said critical habitat designations often don't consider economic impacts.

"We are concerned that there is not enough good economic science being brought to bear on these decisions," she said.

Bruce Farling, executive director of Montana Trout Unlimited, said economic impact studies should receive the same scrutiny as science-based decisions.

Some panelists spoke about collaborative efforts that turned out in the end to be cheaper than litigation.

Trent Clark, director of government affairs for Monsanto Co., said the company spent \$5 million planning to build a road in eastern Idaho to haul phosphate ore. However, that road turned out to go through sage grouse habitat. Instead of fighting in court, he said, the company built a road in the opposite direction to an existing rail line.

He also noted that restoration costs of mined land have gone from \$3,000 an acre two decades ago to more than \$240,000 an acre now.

"This move toward ecological restoration does come with a fairly significant price tag," he said.

The Western Governors' Association said information from the workshops will be compiled into a report to help guide legislative, regulatory and legal actions.

"It's a long process for sure," said John Freemuth, a Boise State University professor and public lands expert who served as facilitator for the workshop. "There are a lot of important people in the room, and people are sitting and talking."

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