

# Heather and Raul; check in with Jim and Sheryl

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

If you want to turn conventional wisdom on its head in Idaho, start flirting with access to public lands.

When then-Congressman C.L. "Butch" Otter even suggested selling off some federal acres to finance relief to Hurricane Katrina victims, he handed his Democratic rival in the upcoming 2006 gubernatorial campaign, newspaper publisher Jerry Brady, his rallying cry: "Idaho is not for sale."

That fall, Brady came the closest of any Democratic candidate for governor - 44.1 percent - since Cecil Andrus retired in 1995.

Then this spring, the unthinkable became the fact.

Two arch foes of federal land management - Idaho County Commission Chairman Jim Chmelik and state Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood - went down to defeat.

Chmelik - who championed the cause of securing control of federal lands within Idaho and the West - got just 36.5 percent of the vote against former Cottonwood Mayor Denis Duman.

Nuxoll - author of a law that empowers sheriffs and county commissioners to declare federal lands within their jurisdictions a public nuisance - lost her seat to Carl Crabtree, who got 51.1 percent of the vote.

This happened not in urban Idaho, where federal lands are gateways to recreation - and transfers are seen as the first step toward handing public lands over to the highest bidders.

Instead, this took shape in the rural, central part of the state where antipathy toward the federal landlords supposedly runs deep.

And it involved Republican primary election voters. This is a party that on the national level last week endorsed platform language encouraging the transfer of 640 million acres of federal lands to the states.

So, take heed, Rep. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard.

Earlier this year, Scott led the charge against a plan to hold in place 13,000 acres held by the Stimson Lumber Co. in Bonner County. In exchange for \$5.5 million in federal forest legacy funds and another \$2 million generated from excise taxes on hunting apparatus, these owners agreed to forgo unpopular plans to develop 1,200 homes and two golf courses.

Sure, this involves private - not public - property rights. But conservation easements are a tool that have been used to preserve Idaho's open spaces everywhere from the South Fork of the Snake River to the Sawtooth National Recreation Area to the lower Salmon River Canyon.

Lawmakers approved the funding package, putting the conservation easement in play. But voters may not forget Scott's efforts to derail that effort.

And take heed, Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho.

His Self-Sufficient Community Lands Act would have states manage up to 4 million acres of federal lands throughout the West - with minimum pilot projects of 200,000 acres each.

It is nothing close to the kind of federal lands transfer Chmelik supports, for instance.

But Democratic congressional candidate James Piotrowski thinks he smells vulnerability. Piotrowski is painting with the broadest brush he can find. Labrador's bill, he says, is just an opening to a larger land transfer - and loss of public access.

If he has his way, the Democrat will transform the congressional race into a referendum on the issue - the same tactic Brady employed against Otter a decade ago.

Both Scott and Labrador have won handily in the past. Scott carried 66 percent of the vote in 2014. That same year, Labrador got 65 percent.

They'd be within their rights to laugh off this argument.

Of course, Chmelik and Nuxoll didn't see the speed bump in front of them, either. - M.T.