

# While Ivory dreamed, Idaho logged trees

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**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune** More than four years ago, Utah state Rep. Ken Ivory, R-West Jordan, blew into Boise with a plan.

Bypass the federal regulations and land managers.

Neutralize the environmentalists.

Go around the national politics.

Go to court. Wrest control of the national forests. Place them under state management. Restore the logging economy and jobs that have been dissipated since the early 1990s.

"Who better to manage these lands than Idahoans?" Sen. Jeff Siddoway, R-Terreton, said at the time.

"Because of federal control, Idahoans have been denied the opportunity to make a living with the land."

So in the intervening years, Idaho lawmakers pursued Ivory's agenda. And in the process, they created a few jobs.

For lawyers and analysts, that is.

After spending more than \$80,000 on outside legal expertise, state lawmakers discovered what their own Idaho attorney general's staff advised for free - that any court challenge to federal land ownership in Idaho was doomed to fail. Not only was the Property Clause of the U.S. Constitution unassailable, but Idaho's own 127-year-old state Constitution provided this obstacle: "The people of the state of Idaho do agree and declare that we forever disclaim all right and title to the unappropriated public lands lying within the boundaries thereof. ..."

Assigned to look into the question at the behest of Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, congressional researchers concluded state ownership would be a \$500 million a year hit the state budget could not afford.

The University of Idaho Policy Analysis Group reached much the same conclusion. Unless Idaho ramped up logging to levels not seen in 40 years and encountered extremely rosy market conditions, the state would lose its shirt.

So the Ivory pipe dream came and went.

On the other hand, the same federal land managers, working with some of those pesky environmentalists, managed to harvest some trees and generate some jobs.

As the Lewiston Tribune's Eric Barker reported last month, logging activity on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest amounted to just under 30 million board feet the year before Ivory showed up.

By 2015, the Nez Perce-Clearwater had sold a total of 58 million board feet. Last year, it came to 60.3 million board feet.

Not only is that trending in the right direction - that is, if you want to put more money in local pockets - but it's being done in tandem with the idea of improving the national forest.

Rather than getting out the cut to sustain the economy, trees are being logged in the name of forest health - reducing fire fuel loads, protecting the wildland-urban interface and addressing areas that have been besieged by insects and disease.

Profits from the timber sales are plowed back into the Forest Service's environmental initiatives - improving fish habitat, safeguarding clean water and protecting wildlife.

And rather than following top-down mandates, county commissioners, loggers, recreationists and some environmental groups have superseded the politics of confrontation with the process of collaboration.

A panacea, this is not.

Some environmentalists contend collaboration has given away too much. Loggers cite lawsuits that have blocked some proposed timber sales. And there's no disputing the point local officials make that you'll not likely see a level of logging - and timber receipts - to alleviate the need to provide timber communities such as Idaho and Clearwater counties with the as-yet moribund Secure Rural Schools funding.

Just the same, it's far more than Ivory ever accomplished. - M.T.