

## Brad Little's echo chamber takes flight

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Suppose U.S. Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., commandeers a government plane.

She fills it with representatives of the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and singer Carole King.

Then they fly out to Idaho and other Western states to discuss how to pass the massive Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act - which would transform 24 million acres of federal lands into designated wilderness areas.

Nobody on that plane speaks for the Idaho rancher, logger or miner who would be dispossessed by that legislation.

No one on that plane talks about the reverse of Muloney's top-down, federally mandated wilderness plan - the home-grown collaborative process that yielded Congressman Mike Simpson's Boulder-White Clouds wilderness package, Sen. Mike Crapo's Owyhee Canyonlands wilderness act or then-Gov. Jim Risch's roadless forest management plan.

You wouldn't like it, right?

So how is it any different when advocates of Idaho's phosphate mining industry do the same thing?

Last month, a contingent of state officials - Lt. Gov. Brad Little, Attorney General Lawrence Wasden, House Assistant Majority Leader Scott Bedke and deputy Attorney General Clive Strong - joined Idaho Mining Association lobbyist Jack Lyman for a tour of southeastern Idaho's phosphate mining district.

There's been some heartburn about that trip because it involved the state's aircraft, a 10-seat, twin-engine King Air. The state Transportation Department doesn't allow for its planes to be chartered by private groups. Lyman is reimbursing the state \$2,543. Little, whose office arranged for the flight, says it was a bargain.

"That would have consumed my entire travel budget for a year," Little told the Associated Press. "Any time you have an industry that affects 3,000 people, we're always concerned about it."

That may be the end of it. Because Little's office reserved the state plane, transportation officials believe their policies were followed. But it's a bureaucratic response. So the rules were followed. So what?

Everybody on that state-owned aircraft heard the same message about mining's economic benefits, the number of jobs it creates and the phosphate's value.

Where on that plane was the voice of concern about how phosphate mining has released dangerous quantities of selenium into the water and food chain? The substance has proven fatal to sheep, horses and cattle that eat selenium-contaminated vegetation.

Where was the person who raised the alarm about selenium poisoning fisheries along the Idaho-Wyoming border? Who raised the alarm about polluted creeks and streams that eventually feed into the Snake River? Who provided the background about notices to anglers not to eat fish caught from some creeks in Caribou County?

Where was the spokesman for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, a group that has gone to court to stop expansion of mining in a district where selenium pollution is at the root of 17 Superfund sites? And who was there to tell these state officials that while the mining companies - Monsanto, J.R. Simplot and Agrium - claim they have the technology to check selenium exposure now, they've not been successful to this point?

Some attempt has been made to make the taxpayer whole. Fine. But more than a month has passed since Little, Lyman and company flew into the phosphate district. When are they going to call the coalition and at least listen to the other side of the story? - M.T.