

Please keep your greedy hands off our land

Devin Rokyta/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

Republicans have included in their national party platform that it is their goal to immediately "take back" millions of acres of federally owned land throughout the West and turn over management to state and local interests.

Sounds good in theory, if it were not for greed, and that it would be unconstitutional.

Through a public records request, The Associated Press recently obtained a copy of a new legal analysis from a group of Western attorneys general - including Lawrence Wasden in Idaho and Bob Ferguson in Washington state - that indicates Utah's push to gain control over more than 30 million acres of federal land within its borders has little to no chance of succeeding.

The report, which was drafted by lawyers from seven Republican attorneys general, three Democrats and one independent, found the Supreme Court and federal courts have repeatedly ruled that the Property Clause of the Constitution gives the U.S. government the right to own public lands and keep them public and the exclusive power to decide whether to dispose of them or sell them off.

Utah has already dumped \$2 million into a group of lawyers to help prepare a case anyway. The fight would likely cost the state up to \$14 million if it chooses to move forward.

There are many in the Idaho Legislature who would like to follow Utah, even if it is a losing proposition.

Study upon study has indicated the states cannot afford to manage the lands if they win, unless their intent is to sell them off to the highest bidders (think rich Texans), open them up to significantly more logging and mining or restrict access by charging usage fees.

So, do you like heading out to the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, for free, without being chased by speeding log trucks or miners with claims or landowners who don't appreciate people hiking through their property? Would you rather scrap the current rules and leave management to the Idaho Legislature?

The federal government - which isn't just politicians in D.C. - has done a great job managing federal lands for the past century. We see no reason to hand such treasured land over to states so a few people can line their pockets with more cash at the expense of the public.