

3 May 1965

Hon. Arnold Olsen,
Representative in Congress,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Arnold:

Under a March 5, 1965 date you wrote me a note with respect the public discussion anent the Selway Bitter Root Wilderness Area. You sent a copy of a letter upon the subject which you had received from the Secretary of Agriculture in which he discusses the matter at considerable length. You ask me for comment.

In view of the fact that you had already seen an editorial upon the subject which I had written, within which I covered the subject at considerable length, it was at first my conclusion to permit the matter to rest. I had hoped that my convictions upon the matter had been adequately expressed and that there could be little more that I personally could do to further a cause in which I believe completely.

Having recently had occasion to again peruse Secretary Orville Freeman's letter it came to my mind that should I continue my quiet attitude on the matter it might be misinterpreted. I do not for one portion of a second desire any such misunderstanding, and because I feel that the arguments in the Secretary's letter can be knocked over like a string of dominoes, it would be indecent not to chronicle the truth so that it be not neglected.

Please do not consider that I have anything other than the greatest respect for Secretary Freeman. Few men in public life should be more esteemed than Freeman, whose courage and activity as governor and as a cabinet member must be recognized by all cognizant with the passing scene. In this instance, however, I cannot but feel he has been grossly misinformed, and when I consider the possibilities for him being subjected to misinformation on this matter, I am not dismayed. Next to the power giant there is no lobby that dares go farther than that which is interested in harvesting natural resources in timber owned by the nation. The situation has got to the point that many citizens are convinced the Forest Service is no longer dedicated to preserving for posterity a natural timber resource, but rather, are acting primarily as a guardian of that timber resource for the lumber interests, so that they can have their timber as they desire it, and not be required to pay taxes upon it while it waits for the saw.

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Of course Secretary Freeman is responsible for those instruments to which he places his signature. But those who provided such background for the letter apparently are very unfamiliar with the territory involved or careless with facts. This is not strange because--at least so far as the Bitter Root is concerned--the average Forest Ranger comes into the area, sets up house-keeping and within a year or two is promoted, moved, transferred from the district--well before he can become competently acquainted with the geography of his district let alone master the intricacies of the soil, the area economy, the water resource, and the myriad of other matters of which he should be versed. Indeed, when the great Saddle Mountain and Eye Creek-Mine fires of 1960 and 1961 respectively burned some 10,000 and 28,000 acres respectively, the Forest Service expended \$1,900,000.00 fighting the latter alone and instead of having the battle directed by Forest workers who lived here and knew the ground, summoned in Forestry generals from Wisconsin and California to ponder and execute the strategy! In both instances General Rain ultimately prevailed. There is much local opinion that if these blazes had been placed under control of a few "old heads" who knew the country and how to wage a battle, a great deal of timber and money would have been salvaged for Uncle Sam. The Forest Bureauocracy has become so big and fat that it is not nimble of foot nor mind. No wonder it falls prey to greedy sawdust merchants!

As you know, Arnold, my university training makes me no scientist and my views upon these matters are based upon long observation, considerable reading, some understanding of economics and politics. I note your eyebrow lifts at the idea of politics but on second thought you know that politicians react to influence of people with economic power and the logging industry moguls possess that.

I started going into the Bitter Root range and the Selway drainage in 1916. Since then almost every year that I have been in the Bitter Root valley, and that is most of the 49 years involved, I have made trips into this wonderful mountain country. When I was a youngster the Selway was referred to as the Clearwater country; nobody talked of it as the Selway. People came from far and wide, royalty from Europe, Pinchot, and numerous "big shots" to view, fish and hunt in the "Clearwater." They still do. It is a big area and I have been in most, but not all of it. I have been all through the upper Selway about which this present controversy is concerned. I have personally been in every part of the upper Selway and know its geography, what lakes feed what streams, to what rivers the streams flow, and so forth. I think I know a great deal more about the area than a lot of people who have been deciding what should be its best use.

I was many times on the Selway before any roads entered into it. I visited with the Horace brothers at their Running Creek ranch and with Phil Shearer

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at his ranch when the salmon came up the Selway in great numbers, before the dam at Lewiston precluded their return to their birthwaters.

The last time I was in the big burned over area between Paradise and Shearers it looked very much the same as the first time that I visited it in 1916. There has been no reforestation that I can see. I doubt if it has been attempted. The sawdust merchants are not seeking that such acreage be taken from the Wilderness Area. The reason is obvious.

With such extended prefatory remarks I shall proceed to provide you with comment upon the letter to which Secretary Freeman's name is subscribed.

First of all it should be borne in mind that the public had no choice in the manner in which the Wilderness Area of the Selway-Bitter Root was carved out of the previous Primitive Area. True, hearings were held but at those hearings the public was told by Forestry officials what they had decided; any argument (and there were many) to the contrary was firmly pushed down by the Forest Service. Some very minor concessions were made in order that the major terms of the Forest Service proposal would not meet absolute condemnation from the public.

Also certain carrots were proffered, apparently with no sincere idea that they would ever come about. For example those of us who fought against the removal of Wilderness status for that portion of the Primitive Area which was situated south of Darby-Salmon Mountain-Elk City Road were led to believe that consideration would be given to including that area in a new Wilderness Area which was in process of manufacture by the Forest Service to be known as the Salmon River Breaks. This has turned out to be a cruel hoax. It is evident from the present trend that all the Forest Service ever intended was to get the Area E and upper Selway regions deleted from protection so they could gouge out with bulldozers in the soft earth of the Selway a cobweb of roadways which would admit the loggers to build their terrace logging roads.

At this point it might be pertinent to ask whether the Forest Service intends in this region to use selective cutting or turn to the more recent clear cut method of logging? That is worth pondering. Either method is going to raise hell with the area from a standpoint of erosion. Take a look at Rye Creek in the Bitter Root and view that creek in floodwater time and also in later summer. The condition would be even worse on the loose soils of the Selway.

The Secretary, upon the basis of information made available to him (by whom?) determined that certain portions of the former Selway-Bitter Root Primitive Area were not predominately valuable for wilderness and hence should be managed for more general purposes. I would like to have whoever

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got this dope to the Secretary tell me if Elk Track Lake and Gold Pan Lake, and their areas, below Salmon Mountain are not wilderness area and what in the hell else they could be used for? There is nothing else they are fit for as Little Abner would remark with pertinent other remarks. While it is true there is quite a bit of nice timber in the Little Clearwater, in the Running Creek drainage up the Selway from Magruder and on Bargamin Creek in places, I am very dubious that Uncle Sam would ever start to get the money back he would have to put into roads to get that timber out. And after it was trucked out to the mills in the Bitter Root what values would be left for watershed, for recreation, for wildlife, for anything? It would take a couple of centuries to even get it started again and if the Forest Service should do no better there than it has in the region referred to before (along the Selway on both sides from Paradise to Shearer) it is debatable if the region would be reforested in a millenium.

The Secretary's letter points out that the road system in Area X was one of the influencing factors in the decision not to designate the area as wilderness. This calls to mind that the Primitive Area was set up in 1937 and that the roads into the area were built by the CCC, working under Forest Service supervision, afterward. Just who is responsible for those roads? And what value has the argument anyway when it is recalled that similar situations--such as that on Lost Horse Creek in the Bitter Root--is concerned with the identical situation? On the Lost Horse the Forestry had no trouble placing a boundary at a short distance all the way around the road and keeping the territory behind that boundary in Wilderness status. The same thing could have been done with respect to the Darby, Deep Creek, Salmon Mountain, Elk City road, had there been a will to do it. Also the implied promise to include the Upper Selway and within the Salmon River Breaks Wilderness Area to be created, could have been redeemed.

The reference in the letter relative the exclusion along the face of the Bitter Root range is without foundation in fact. There are in the neighborhood of 50 irrigation reservoirs along the eastern face of the Bitter Roots on ledges or within cirques high in the mountains. There are roads to but two of these (Fred Burr and Bass Creek). Most of the others are utterly inaccessible to road building, even with use of modern machinery, even with the Forest Service. And there is no reason for building roads to them. Most of them could not be dammed to any greater extent and most of them are small. One exception remains; viz., a proposed dam on Blodgett Creek, for which a corridor was carved out of one of the loveliest canyons of all, so a road could be built to a proposed dam site. It is doubtful if this will ever be realized because the farmers as individuals or in form of an irrigation district could never finance such a deal; the state of Montana in the foreseeable future will not be able to finance such a proposition; the construction by the federal government is unlikely for reason the project would be too small.

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Use of the Selway area by recreationists, hunters, fishermen and sightseers is now possible on the existing road. The records are incomplete but there are every year several thousand people using this road for these purposes, particularly for elk hunting in the Selway by Idaho hunters in the autumn. They do not need a boulevard to enjoy the wilderness uses of the area. Indeed a paved highway into such an area for the purposes detailed just above would ruin the reaction of most people intent on such a wilderness outing.

And if most, or even a substantial portion of the forest is removed will the lure remain for recreationists? Do you ever see people picnicing in a cut-over stump-land? Will the present fishing, not to speak of a possible rebuilt salmon fishery, prosper if the present clearwater of the Selway river is polluted with brown soil?

Let us go up the Selway from Magruder to its very source, beyond Thompson Flat, to Wood Kump, just under the Montana-Idaho border, all the way up you have unusual mountain scenery; you are alone in the wilderness. If it is not wilderness there is no such thing. Take out the trees and cart them to the mills in the Bitter Root. What is there left for the recreationist, for the outdoor lover? What pray tell is there left for the citizens of Idaho who have lost their timber, their watershed, their wilderness, their outdoor wonderland so that for a very brief interval the saws will hum in mills in the Bitter Root. Meantime Uncle Sam will be not only out of pocket for cost of the roads--because the federal government actually pays for these roads, no matter what the myth of payment by the loggers may seem. The footage bought in this remote area is not going to bring the same money to Uncle Sam that the same amount of footage would bring if taken from the face of the Bitter Roots--from which too much has already been deleted. And Idahoans have lost their heritage to the Montana lumber industry. If such a small amount of timber, relatively, was necessary to the continued prosperity of the Montana lumber industry such a sacrifice might properly be contemplated. But the industry is doomed if it must have these relatively few sticks upon which to survive.

The same thing is true of the timber throughout the entire Area E and for that matter throughout the Selway. Its prime value is in watershed and cover for a wilderness of loose soils. Neither volume of timber or grazing areas warrant converting Area E to multiple use. During the 1950's the Forest Service terminated permits for several bands of sheep in Area E because of poor quality of grazing lands and the damage being incurred to the loose granitic soils. Logging any part of the area is hard to imagine if those in charge have the best interests of the area at heart.

While there does exist a roadway through this large region, which serves the public from perhaps the first of July, or possibly some years a bit

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earlier, until the snows of autumn close the road in October or thereabout, the value of building an Interstate, or even a state highway, through the region is difficult to imagine today. The Secretary speaks of possible transmission lines following such a route. From where to where and why? Would not some other route be better from every standpoint? Right now that is a wild dream. Perhaps the Selway might be dammed and an outlet be required but it is more likely that it would be better taken from the possible damsite, which certainly would be far down the stream, and thence out via Selway Falls to the Lochsa road and a water grade into Idaho, or even over the low Lolo Pass into Montana.

Arnold, there are no valid reasons in the letter to which the name of Secretary Freeman is appended. He has been imposed upon by persons who should be horse-whipped. I wish that he could come into the Bitter Root, and I wish that you could too, so that he could, and you could, be taken into the Selway Bitter Root area so that first hand knowledge of that which we are talking about could become available to him, and to you. Busy as I am I would like to accompany such a trip, get away from the road and away from those with an axe to grind (either lumber industrialist or Forest Service bureaucrat) so that personal impressions could be freely arrived upon. I suppose this is an idle dream. Everybody is too busy. Too much time would be required. So decisions are made on a basis of "make the fast buck" information fed to officials who naturally come to the conclusion they are getting facts instead of slow poison.

What is the hurry? Why must these roads be built now? There are plenty of places all over the nation where there is a crying need for adequate roads. Why not build them at such places and permit the Upper Selway, Area E, and the rest of the former Bitter Root Selway Primitive Area to maintain its present status for a few years?

The timber sought by the timber barons will be equally or more desirable to them ten years from today, or twenty years from today. In the meantime this wilderness land can be viewed with more detachment to the end that ultimately it may be used to the best purpose for all of the people, for all time, in the long run--as an old saying may be paraphrased.

If the lumber industry needs the timber today it will need it twice as badly twenty years from today. And it will be twice as valuable. Any argument about maturity can be cancelled out. In the eyes of foresters most of it is past maturity now.

So the thing should be compromised. The area should be put on ice for twenty years by action of the Secretary in making all outside the present Selway Bitter Root Area a Primitive Area--an untouchable area. Call it the Macruder National Monument, The Nez Perce National Park, call it anything but by

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force of such a determination by the Secretary remove it from any commercialisation or use above that of a Primitive Area for a goodly term of years. If the Secretary won't do it, an act of the Congress could set it aside. Why could not you and Senator Church, for example, introduce companion bills aimed at such a compromise solution.

In a few years this proposition might be looked upon from far different angles than those from which it is viewed today. Just what is the hurry? There are still plenty of trees in the national forests for the mills in the Bitter Root and the Idaho mills won't get any of this Idaho timber anyway.

I hope this provides you with the comment you sought. If you can get the time to make a trip into this region I will take time off to show it to you. I'm probably busier than even you, and time is running out for me.

I'm going to send copies of this communication to several other people including Mike and Lee. When I take this much time I want to get all the mileage possible. And you know I'm not making a cent on it, nor never can. That's different from some people I could speak about. And it will be a happy day when the Forest Service people start taking more seriously to grave duties of salvaging a remnant of the natural resources they preside over, for posterity. If they don't posterity is going to be in a hell of a fix.

Regards to you and Margaret.

Sincerely,

Miles Romney
Publisher,
The Western News
Hamilton, Montana.

MR:sj

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