

of that meaningful partnership." He points out that "any attempt at breaking new ground will turn up some rocks and dull a few plow shears, but the time has come to shift from

inertia to initiative and cultivate." The Sagebrush Rebellion has spawned some fresh perspectives that could alter the course of federal-state relations in the West. ●

## Observations on Rangelands and the Political Process

# Public Lands and Public Policy



Frank L. Lundburg

More than being simply neglected, for decades the rangeland resources of the western United States has been ignored. The advent of increased population growth, increased demands for energy resources and an increased mobility and awareness of the society as a whole has changed that situation. Now, we in the West find ourselves caught amid increased and sometimes conflicting demands for the use of the lands which have been part of the history and culture of our respective states since before their entry into the Union. These changes, culminating with the implementation of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, are causing us to examine certain traditions and principles of state federal relations; of the relationship between economic stability and environmental quality; and of the dilemma of relating concerns which may be in the national interest to concerns which represent the interests of individuals, localities, and states.

Within the past year, this examination has centered around the issue of state versus federal ownership of public lands, known commonly as the "Sagebrush Rebellion." Because the Sagebrush Rebellion has become an emotional issue, it is important to acknowledge the underlying causes and provide alternative solutions for the problems. The Sagebrush Rebellion can be considered to be a representation of citizens' frustrations: first of all about specific issues of the ranching industry centering around the development of environmental statements and other actions mandated by recent statutes and regulations and a perceived national dominance of "environmental" philosophies in national policy. It is also representative, however, of citizens' frustrations about government, especially the federal bureaucracy. Therefore, solutions must lie in some reform of the bureaucracy and more clearly defined roles for the federal government, the states and citizens of the west. The pros and cons of the Nevada Legislation creating the basis for a challenge

in the courts to the federal ownership of the lands are being debated at length and it is not necessary to elaborate here, except to say that there appears on the surface to be ample constitutional precedent for the federal ownership of the lands—in any event, the issue will be decided in the courts, and as such, is somewhat outside the bounds of the subject of public lands and policy.

The following offers some thoughts on that political process as it relates to public land management issues from the vantage point of the office of the chief executive of a state. That process will involve an analysis of how citizens' demands are perceived, how decisions are made in response to those demands, and problems encountered in the implementation of the resulting policies.

**First, we must consider how public policy is made.** Policy comes about as the result of political leadership responding to the perceived needs of the society. These perceived needs are manifested either through citizen demands or through the personal philosophy of the political leader, or, in most instances, a combination of both. The chief executive of a state must fulfill the responsibilities of representing the people; seeing that the laws are "faithfully executed"; achieving workable solutions to problems all in the context of also providing his own ideas about the management of government—the platform and philosophy he offered the people when he was elected. The role of each element in this process will vary from issue to issue; however, all elements will be present.

The process is complicated, however, by the challenge of representing the people and perceiving the demands they make for which there are workable solutions. During the last two decades we have been experiencing some subtle but profound changes in the political system of this country. Political parties are playing less and less of a role in the decision making process and more and more we are seeing the advent of "single interest" politics. Because of this political leaders are being forced to respond to whichever group on a particular issue carries the most influence. In so doing, the give and take of compromise on issues, the bringing about of consensus is limited. As consensus is diminished, the likelihood of dissatisfaction of groups whose demands are not met increases and hence more vocal opposition is heard about certain issues or groups whether it be "environmentalists," the federal government, welfare, or maybe just

The author is cochairman, Staff Advisory Council, National Governors' Association, Subcommittee on Rangeland Resource Management, and assistant for agriculture to Governor John V. Evans of Idaho.

*About the Author:* In addition to his working titles mentioned above, Frank L. Lundburg has served on the personal staff of Governor John V. Evans since January, 1977. He is the Governor's representative to the Idaho Rangeland Committee and to the State Rural Clean Water Committee; and is a member of the Society for Range Management.

He attended George Washington University; received a BS degree from Idaho State University at Pocatello and a Master's from the University of Oregon; and attended the College of Law at the University of Idaho for one year.

that amorphous "they." Frustration and dissatisfaction also increase as the society and the issues become more complex and varied. Coupling this with the abrupt changes affecting all of us, such as the availability of energy, the changing composition of the social structure, inflation and others which challenge our accustomed and traditional way of life, it is not surprising that the majority of the public is discontented about something. It is also not surprising that political leaders sometimes appear slow to respond to specific problems.

The issues which have caused the present "Sagebrush Rebellion" controversy have followed this pattern. Changes in thinking about the role of the rangelands, with support from strong national interest groups, have caused new actions to take place on the public lands. In a comparatively short period of time, many western citizens have been confronted with federal policies and procedures concerning environmental statements, wilderness studies, wild horse management practices, wildlife management practices, and a whole new group of competing uses for the public lands. Political leaders at all levels have been slow to respond to the impact of these new actions.

**This slowness has come about because** of another factor in the political process—the implementation of public policy into definitive actions. In their zeal to effect some change, many interest groups have been content simply with contributing to the passage of some law without giving much thought to the implementation of the law. We have experienced this situation in almost all areas of government—whenever we see a "problem" our first inclination is to pass a law which we then assume will solve the problem—we then leave the implementation of that law to the local, state, or federal agency involved, often without giving that agency clear direction as to the intent of Congress or the Legislature and especially often without giving that agency the resources to truly deal with the problem in a meaningful way.

This has also been one of the causes of the present land management problems. While there is precedent to fall back upon for federal ownership of public lands, there have been few, if any precedents established in state-federal relations for the management of those lands. Until the last ten years those lands, as stated in the beginning, were more or less ignored by all levels of government. In fact, the major concern or care for the lands came from the families who grazed livestock and derived some portion of their living off of the lands. Historically, in the United States where there has been an absence of policy, or where roles need to be defined, that definition has occurred as the result of governmental responses to problems at different levels. That is where we currently find ourselves in public land management policy. The question remains as to whether or not the government can respond quickly enough to the many demands and respond in a manner which represents a consensus of the interests involved given difficulty in achieving a consensus on these issues.

Idaho has promoted an approach which attempts to recognize the preceding elements. We are trying to seek solutions to disagreements over range management which are workable and which treat the causes of the problems, not merely the symptoms. Utilizing precedents set by the Idaho Rangeland Committee, a voluntary committee composed of the major range use agencies and interests in the state, and the legal guidelines of Sections 8 and 12 of the Public Rangeland Improvement Act of 1978, the state is basing its role in range

management upon the following premises:

- That the central issue is not livestock versus environmental interests or the state government versus the federal government, but rather, the responsible management of the land.
- That there can and should be a role for state government in the public land management planning and implementation process.
- That livestock and environmental interests on the land are not incompatible; that those interests share more in common than they differ.
- That the term "environment" must be taken in the context of three components if we are to maintain our way of life in Idaho and the west. Those components are social, physical, and economic and there must be a balance of those three interests if sound policies are to come about.
- That it is possible for sound policies to come about if all parties to a problem are able to negotiate their differences and that this negotiation should take place as close to the land as possible.

**In addition, state governments should re-examine** their present approaches to land management and natural resource problems in general. For the states to assume a viable role in the state-federal management partnership, the executive branch of government must have a concrete idea of where it wants to go—of what the people want in the coming years for the state. This can be accomplished through the use of citizens' committees to recommend long range policy criteria to the governor and the Legislature. It could also be done through an expanded role for the land grant University in supplying technical assistance and research on sound range management policies and assessing the economic impact of state and federal actions on local communities. Still another means would be the establishment of a commission to work in partnership with other state agencies and the federal agencies to articulate the concerns of the states and localities. Whatever means is chosen, to be effective, it is essential to have a strong commitment from the office of the governor or a body created at that level.

We are seeing a new commitment to decentralization of decision making in range management emanating from Washington, D.C. If the individual states can identify roles for themselves in the process, not just natural resource management, but the entire nation will benefit.

The land has always been this nation's most precious resource. It has been the catalyst for, and the symbol of, our growth; our independence; our ability to support ourselves and maintain our standard of living; and our opportunity to relate to the majesty of life itself in all its forms. Now, that land as a resource is no longer limitless. Our commitment to that resource, what it can produce, and the benefits to be derived from it must transcend the boundaries of politics and self. The need for the benefits from the land is greater than any single state or community; however, as with our national history, we have been able to make the best decisions when the interests of the individual can be balanced with the interests of the society. That task has always been the most difficult, for it involves the mutual respect of people and interests, but where that has occurred, both our individual freedom and national stability have been enhanced. With truly national and state commitments by all interests of resources and understanding, our land management policies will achieve that strength and stability. ●