

John Block Reports from Washington
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“Federal Land”

Hello everybody out there in farm country. This radio commentary is brought to you by Monsanto, and John Deere. They are all friends, supporters, and allies of a healthy farm economy and prosperous rural America. Thank you.

And now for today's commentary—

The federal government doesn't have many fans in rural America, and we can't blame everything on EPA. Now, the Forest Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Bureau of Land Management both have decided to tighten control over public land. That has resulted in a loud dispute.

First, the BLM confiscated the Bundy Ranch cattle in Nevada because Bundy was not paying his land rent. I'm not here to blame the BLM for demanding payment, but taking a rancher's cattle doesn't sound like a reasonable approach.

Now, we have another confrontation in New Mexico where the Forest Service has fenced off a creek denying cattle access to water. Local ranchers are livid. They argue that they own the water rights inside the Lincoln National Forest. Their cattle have been drinking from that stream for years but, not now. Forest Service argues that they are trying to protect the habitat for the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse. The mouse is expected to be listed on the Endangered Species List in June. Are they suggesting that cattle drinking out of that stream will be sure death to the mouse?

I remember all the fights when the government was protecting the kangaroo rat in California. To me, the only good rat is a dead rat. The same could be said for a mouse. A large number of citizens in the West are not happy about this government's overreach.

That brings me to an issue that I would like to put on the table. Why is one-half the land in the west owned by the federal government anyway? 81% of Nevada, 66% of Utah, 62% of Alaska, 62% of Idaho, 53% of Oregon. The federal government owns 640 million acres. That is more than one-quarter of the land in the U.S. – most of it west of the Mississippi. That is more land than France, Poland, Italy, Spain, and the UK all together.

I'm not sure this is justified. Maybe some of it could be sold. I'm not suggesting the government sell our national parks. But there are millions and millions of acres that could be put to better use in private hands. I can't think of any developed nation that has this much land under government control.

Perhaps the rancher disputes will spark a national debate on this subject.

Until next week, I am John Block in Washington, D.C.