

from the CAPITOL

By GOV. GRANT SAWYER



ONE YEAR AGO, President Johnson signed into law three significant pieces of public land legislation. They established a Public Land Law Review Commission and provided for the interim management and disposal of public lands pending completion of a comprehensive investigation of current public land policies.

The commission was established to study existing laws and procedures relating to the administration of the public lands of the United States. One of the principal features of this law expresses the policy of the Congress that the public lands of the United States shall be retained and managed, or disposed of, in a manner to provide the maximum benefit to the general public. The commission is charged to deliver its report to Congress by December 31, 1968.

The Classification and Multiple Use Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to classify certain lands for disposal or interim management under principles of multiple use. It is designed to provide in one central act, a basic authority for the management and disposal of the public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. This act expires on June 30, 1969.

THE PUBLIC SALE ACT of 1964, allows the Bureau of Land Management to sell public domain in the eleven Western States. It fills a gap in the Bureau's land program, permitting sales of larger tracts needed for community growth, industrial and commercial expansion, and residential and agricultural development. A feature of this act requires that the local county government must enact zoning regulations and the land must be zoned as suitable for the purposes intended. This act also will expire on June 30, 1969.

The population explosion in our state has brought us to a vital crossroads. The scarcest commodity for an expanding population in the 1960's is land. We need land for recreation, but we also need land for homes and businesses in our communities now surrounded by public lands. We simultaneously have an ever increasing need for the resources that go with the land; water to drink, water for agriculture and industry, unpolluted water in which to swim, and water for boating and fishing.

Congress has set the machinery in motion to modify or revise the present multitude of laws dealing with the public lands. At my request, the last session of the Nevada Legislature established a State Committee on Federal Land Laws to represent and enunciate Nevada's position on public lands along with other Western States before the Federal Land Law Review Commission. Whatever changes the Federal Commission recommends and whatever action is taken by Congress on these recommendations will have telling effects in Nevada for generations to come.

BEARING IN MIND that the Homestead act was enacted over 100 years ago, the basic mining law 90 years ago, and the Taylor Grazing Act 30 years ago, I think we can all agree that the tremendous expansion in population of the country since the end of World War II and the significant changes that have taken place requires some modernization of our public land laws.

The population of Nevada has increased 50 percent during the past five years. Over 85 percent of Nevada is owned by the Federal Government. Our small tax base is beginning to hurt our local governments dependent on property tax to support their functions. Clark County is 98.94 percent public domain, leaving only 1.06 percent to support a county of about 272,000 people.

The Nevada State Committee on Federal Land Laws is a strong committee representing banking, city and county governments, wool growers, livestock raising, fish and game commissioners, mining, agriculture, education, recreation and conservation, railroads and the general public. I am certain that the men representing these interests will come up with a strong and decisive policy which will be presented before the federal commission. Land is one of our most important resources. We must have land to meet our expanding population requirements.

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