

Nevadans Still Don't Know Who Culprits Are

These meetings took place during the first sage brush rebellion.

The environmental movement as we knew it in the 1980s & 90s had not gotten a start yet, but that did not stop the BLM & Forest Service from making it hard on miners & ranchers.

Early in February Ed Rowland, state director of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, came to Elko to address a meeting of an estimated 800 Nevada residents who were concerned about a growing vindictiveness in BLM attitudes toward livestock operators and miners, the two principal users in Nevada of land controlled by that federal agency.

Rowland was pleasant, but didn't provide many answers. Essentially he gave the impression that somebody on up the bureaucratic line, somebody in Washington, was calling the shots that threatened to inflict so much harm on so many Nevada residents.

Because of the inadequacy of Rowland's performance, Congressman Jim Santini responded to frustrations voiced by a number of Nevadans and arranged for Curt Berklund, national director of the BLM, to appear in the state and, hopefully, provide some answers to the many questions which are troubling users of so-called public lands in Nevada.

Berklund made his appearance Saturday afternoon in Elko, with an estimated 650 people in attendance, but most of the people we talked to after the meeting were shaking their heads and complaining they didn't learn any more from Berklund than they did from Rowland.

By our analysis, those criticisms were justified. Berklund tried a little different technique for a bureaucrat — by telling some funny stories with coarse language in the punch lines and by pretending to talk tough — but actually he employed those tactics, deftly we admit, as camouflage for the same evasive double-talk that has become a sort of trademark of the BLM as it turns the thumbscrews ever tighter on the ranchers and the miners.

During his prepared speech, Berklund attempted to describe himself as one of the good guys and suggested the livestock industry should focus its wrath not upon him but instead upon what he described as "...powerful groups at work today that would like to see livestock taken off the public range in favor of growing forage for wildlife, wild horses and burros, or as scenery. In short, they feel the best way to preserve the public lands will

be to remove livestock from the public range."

The trouble is, Berklund did not identify the bad guys. He did not name the "powerful groups" nor did he tell his audience the specific identity of the ominous "they" who seek to remove livestock from the public range.

At one point, during a question and answer period, Berklund publicly apologized to Les Stewart, a Humboldt County rancher who entered into a range management agreement with the BLM only to see the agreement arbitrarily violated by the agency. Berklund said: "You were wronged and wronged badly ... (but) we were ordered to do it."

Once again, in his apology to Stewart, Berklund avoided naming the official who ordered the abuse against the Nevada rancher. Berklund's excuse was about as ridiculous as comedian Flip Wilson's "The devil made me do it ..."

The way we see it, after two mass meetings of Nevadans being victimized by BLM policy changes, the victims still do not know the identity of the culprits. We recognized before the February meeting with Rowland that some evil force, probably in Washington, D.C., was putting a destructive squeeze on Nevada ranchers and miners (and by secondary impacts on a good many other Nevadans — as Dale Porter described so well at Saturday's session). After hearing from two officials of the BLM, we still do not know the specific identity of this enemy — or these enemies — of the people of Nevada.

It is our recommendation that elected representatives of those people of Nevada keep up their efforts to smoke out the "powerful groups" who seek to debilitate Nevada's economy and welfare, and when they locate the culprits drag them to Elko to face the people they are hurting.

And if the effort to bring those culprits into Nevada to answer for their actions fails, we think more support will be generated for the proposition that Nevada's legislature take those so-called public lands out of federal control and place them under state jurisdiction, where many of us believe it should have been since Oct. 31, 1864, the date of Nevada statehood. — M

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