

WATCHDOG!



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CHANGE IN DIRECTION

After careful consideration, SOFAR believes it is no longer possible to ignore the grave impacts the politics behind the Iraq war pose for San Diego and other American cities - namely, impacts on the health of our environment, the quality of our housing and transportation, and our financial stability.

With our highest federal officials focused on a distant, unwinnable war, City building, hallowed as the highest form of public art, has become woefully neglected. As a result, many of America's cities have become cultural deserts, where dysfunctional transportation systems and housing patterns combine to undermine the quality of life for residents.

Our president's decision to plunge the nation into a senseless and costly war has hastened the deterioration of our cities, although everyone agrees these municipalities desperately need massive infrastructure investment (estimated to be 1.6 trillion dollars by the American Society for Civil Engineers). The ever-increasing toll of the Iraq war can be seen in so many ways here at home: less money for cities, reservists stationed overseas and unavailable for assistance with domestic disasters, and the continued erosion of our civil liberties as a result of the Patriot Act. Did we ever think the Administration would use Congress's resolution of war to justify wiretapping of citizens in every American city?

During this critical period of our history, we citizens must remember that America was founded on the principle that liberty and justice *are indivisible*. If one person loses the rights that flow from these principles, we *all* lose them. The founding fathers were clearly aware that it was tyranny, not terror, that was the real threat to a free and democratic life. To guard against tyranny, these brilliant patriots ensured that three branches of government were guaranteed their equal, but separate powers. The Iraq war and the policies that it "justifies" are strikes against these very principles. Thus, the war on Iraq is ultimately a war against America. For this reason, we can no longer carry on business as usual and pretend that the war does not profoundly undermine our existence at home.

At SOFAR, we have always recognized the distinction between power and authority. When those in power abdicate their authority by failing to serve the common good, we believe it is the duty of citizens to respond. This is precisely why SOFAR responded to the County supervisors' failure to protect the national forest with proper zoning by introducing and ensuring the passage of the Forest Initiative in 1993. And this is also why we are taking a new direction in the new year and turning our focus to the Administration's misguided policies: while it is true that President Bush is in a position of ultimate power, by his speech and actions he is quickly losing all legitimate authority.

SOFAR RESPONSE TO BILL TO SELL NATIONAL FOREST LANDS

Over the last five years, the Bush Administration has attacked our land, our values, our country's reputation, and even the rights guaranteed by our Constitution. Following the lead of the President, this September Colorado Congressman Thomas Tancredo introduced a House Bill proposing to sell federal lands, including 15% of national forest lands, to fund the recovery process in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This latest assault on our country's resources would make it a priority to sell California national forests because the federal government owns a high percentage of lands in the state. The sales would take place by October, 2006.

At SOFAR, we do not believe national forest lands should *ever* be eligible for sale because they belong to the public. Our forest lands are limited and irreplaceable. Anyone can see that it is foolish to rely on these lands to fund disaster relief because there will continue to be natural disasters in America. Accordingly, SOFAR responded to this outrageous proposal with the following letter:

December 6, 2005

The Honorable Thomas Tancredo
House of Representatives
Washington D.C.

Dear Mr. Tancredo,

We are writing about House Bill H.R. 3855 and are deeply concerned about the harmful effects that are certain to follow from passage of this legislation, which proposes to sell federal lands, including national forest lands, to fund reconstruction in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. While the introductory language of H.R. 3855 may sound worthwhile, a closer examination of this bill tells a different story.

Since your bill is at heart a funding request for a national emergency, it is unavoidable not to bring up the financial hemorrhaging that is being caused by the Iraq war. Under false pretenses, America has tragically squandered billions of taxpayer dollars on a never-ending war that should not have been fought in the first place. It is not an exaggeration to say that we could meet the emergency caused by the Hurricane Katrina and other emergencies if the funds wasted in Iraq were still available for real national purposes. Examined in this light, your proposal is a scandal on top of an even greater scandal.

President Bush said at the beginning of the Iraq war, when Baghdad fell, that it was a "catastrophic success"-- and he is correct: what your proposal reveals is that America has succeeded in bringing a catastrophe upon itself. Think about it. Like Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of porridge, you are proposing to sell our natural heritage for political purposes. Furthermore, it has come to the attention of many unbiased observers that the relief effort itself is plagued with fraud and corruption. Your proposal, like the war in Iraq, endangers America.

America has a special, long-standing tradition of setting aside land to be preserved by the federal government for generations of public enjoyment. This policy was begun by the great Theodore Roosevelt, a Republican and the greatest conservationist president in our history. President Roosevelt created 150 national forests in addition to numerous federal bird reservations, national game preserves, national parks and national monuments.

This was the work of one of the most admired presidents of the United States both nationally and internationally. As the former Mongolian prime minister H.E.T. Elbegdorj remarked in 1999, "We in Mongolia admire Theodore Roosevelt for many reasons. One of the most important is the example he set for the world in conservation." In recognition of Roosevelt's contributions to our nation and the world, his likeness is carved in rock on Mt. Rushmore. Roosevelt's vision of our country epitomizes the message in the patriotic song "America the Beautiful," written by Katherine Lee Bates and inspired by the view of the plains and Rocky Mountains from Pike's Peak in Colorado.

The historical reasons for establishing our national forests are still valid today--and may even be more crucial than ever before. It is undisputed that open spaces have rapidly declined, especially in Southern California, where urban dwellers live completely removed from natural settings. In such circumstances it is easy to forget the services that our forest provides. In San Diego County, the Cleveland National Forest was established as a means of protecting the watersheds. It still contains the only local source of clean natural water. Protecting watersheds with forest cover, such as the Cleveland National Forest, is also essential to prevent major fires and the flooding that follows from damaging southern California agriculture and metropolitan areas. Since the formation of the Cleveland National Forest, this critical area has developed the additional purpose of providing habitat for sixty-one sensitive plant and wildlife species and twenty-two threatened and endangered species. Moreover, it is one of the few places near San Diego where residents can travel in under an hour to get away from the city.

The national forests are our inheritance, and it is our leaders' responsibility to protect them for future generations. It is appalling even to *discuss* selling these precious areas--our national forests are not assets to be exchanged for money. Only a person lacking all sense of public welfare could turn them into a commodity. The issue is best summarized by Theodore Roosevelt, who stated, "Defenders of the short-sighted men who in their greed and selfishness will, if permitted, rob our country of half its charm by their reckless extermination of all useful and beautiful wild things sometimes seek to champion them by saying the 'the game belongs to the people.' So it does; and not merely to the people now alive, but to the unborn people."

House bill H.R. 3855 directly contravenes Roosevelt's enlightened notion that the most magnificent places in our country are simply not *eligible* for private ownership, but rather are national treasures to be shared by all citizens. It is essential that the federal government, the government of all the people in the United States, holds onto these lands to conserve them for the public to enjoy them for years to come.

For the above reasons, we urge you to follow the lead of Theodore Roosevelt and please withdraw this ill-advised and destructive piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Duncan McFetridge
President of Save Our Forest and Ranchlands

CC: Theodore Roosevelt Association
Cleveland National Forest Supervisor
US Department of Agriculture
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The standard of greed that is reflected in the above bill by Rep. Tancredo is echoed by Ann Coulter, the right-wing columnist who speaks for the spirit of the Bush Administration: "God says, 'Earth is yours. Take it. Rape it. It's yours.'"

-Hannity & Colmes, June 22, 2001

While this statement seems far-out, it actually summarizes the White House's attitude toward the Arctic wilderness, toward global warming, toward reduction of endangered species habitat, toward clearing - and even selling - America's forests. All these actions express a fundamental hostility to the common good that we find in nature and in the human community. We are repeatedly counseled by the Administration to pursue wealth, but at what cost? There are some things that cannot be bought and some things that cannot be sold.

The wisdom of Chief Seattle shows a contrasting perspective on humankind's relationship to our planet. "Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves. This we know, the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth... This earth is precious to Him, and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its Creator."

-Chief Seattle's 1854 Oration

THE POET AND THE WARRIOR



PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT
WITH JOHN MUIR IN YOSEMITE
NATIONAL PARK

From a city-building and environmentalist point of view, America's greatest photograph could be this image of the poet and the warrior, John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt, standing on sacred ground. Today urban planners know the vital role that public transit plays in good city-building and in environmental sustainability.

But they may not know that one of America's greatest conservationists, Theodore Roosevelt, was also a passionate believer in rapid transit and signed the Rapid Transit Bill in 1899 when he was governor of New York. Where are warriors for the common good today?

SOFAR STUDY OF CITY PLANNING IN BORDEAUX, FRANCE



Bordeaux, France has recently made massive, wide-ranging improvements in infrastructure and transportation. A new 3-line tramway was implemented in the metropolitan center. The project is in the second phase, and by 2007 the city plans to have 43.3 km of tram tracks serving 84 stations. Car-free zones have been created in main plazas and major streets. Other projects are underway to revitalize the commercial areas alongside the river and quays and to regenerate districts that have deteriorated.

By investing in the urban center, the leaders of Bordeaux hope to discourage outward sprawl. For those who can read French, more information is available on the website of CUB, which is the equivalent of SANDAG in Bordeaux: <http://www.lacub.com>.

SOFAR member Karine Merle has set up a small office in Bordeaux to further study the city's transportation renaissance. Among other things, Karine is preparing to guide a city-building tour so that visitors from San Diego can see what has been done in Bordeaux and realize that similar dramatic changes are possible in San Diego too. Details about the tour will be forthcoming in future Watchdog newsletters.