

# editorial

## Armstrong is radical, not moderate, on wilderness issues

When Colorado Senator Gary Hart proposed a "Sense of the Senate" resolution in early December that would provide interim protection to Colorado lands that are candidates for wilderness designation, Colorado Senator Bill Armstrong became, according to the *Rocky Mountain News*, "furious."

To me, Armstrong's opposition to this simple action, which would have had no legal authority, shows that his true intentions are not to see a reasonable compromise on the wilderness issue. He would prefer there be no wilderness at all.

Hart's proposed amendment to a Congressional spending bill would have barred the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management from granting permits for commercial activities in lands that are candidates for wilderness preservation under a compromise worked out in 1984 by the two Colorado Senators.

The Senate voted it down 50 to 45 on a party-line vote. Armstrong's influence over his Republican colleagues no doubt strongly directed that outcome.

Hart observed that live permits for timbering and oil and gas leasing now exist in those lands envisioned for wilderness designation. Locally, the Fossil Ridge Wilderness Study Area is be-

ing used by motorcycles which would otherwise be banned from such lands.

Hart had asked the USFS to protect the candidate lands, but USFS Chief Max Peterson said he has no legislative direction to do so. In fact, in 1980 Senator Armstrong made sure that the USFS would be mandated to allow non-wilderness type activities. He forced an inclusion into the 1980 Colorado Wilderness Act which says the candidate lands shall be managed as non-wilderness in mineral development and grazing.

"I would like to make it clear that access by cars, jeeps, snowmobiles and other motor vehicles into the congressionally designated wilderness study areas...is to be permitted during the period of study..." he said on December 4, 1980.

Lands damaged by timbering, mining, off-road vehicles and such are rarely considered for wilderness by Congress. Hart wants to insure that such damage does not occur during study. Tom Gleason of Hart's Denver office said the Senator accepted the 1980 language only because it then seemed likely the issue would be resolved by 1983 or 1984.

Now, because of the intense dispute over wilderness water rights, resolution before 1989 is unlikely, Hart's staff said. Much

damage could occur before then.

Armstrong continually invokes the credos of President Theodore Roosevelt and his Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot who advocated "wise use" of lands, as opposed to preservation. "Use" is always for human purposes and inevitably entails some form of commercial activities. The idea of preserving lands as they are for the sake of the non-human critters who inhabit them is totally foreign to Armstrong's mind.

In that same December 4, 1980 statement, Armstrong indicated he would prefer to allow owners of private land inholdings unlimited access across public wilderness lands. With such access, though, the landowner could build a factory smack dab in the middle of a wilderness. (Armstrong got his way that same year when Senator Melcher [D.-Montana] included such language in the Alaska lands bill.)

As a staunch opponent to an Oh-Be-Joyful Wilderness, Armstrong accepted its inclusion as a Wilderness Study Area in 1980 only because of the strong grassroots support demonstrated for the tiny area. "To be frank, I expect a non-wilderness decision at an early date," he said. A month later in January, 1981, he urged the Secretary

of Agriculture to do a quick and dirty study of Oh Be Joyful which would, of course, provide that negative recommendation.

In the succeeding years he has always refused to recognize the consequences of these policies. Despite obvious facts put before him, he insists the lands are not threatened.

In 1984 he brought up the wilderness water rights issue and used it to kill the pending resolution of the Colorado wilderness issue. His hand-picked negotiator from the private Colorado Water Congress was able to compromise with environmentalists, but Armstrong could not accept that so he quickly found a spokesman for a more radical viewpoint—that there should be no water rights for Indian Reservations in National Parks, either—and used that person's opposition as an excuse.

After federal Judge John Kane ruled last month that wilderness does have water rights, Senator Hart and Representative Tim Wirth (D.-Colorado) called for a negotiated settlement, a compromise that would balance preservation and resource development. They note that the issue is more political than legal. It's up to Congress to resolve it.

Armstrong, though, called for an immediate appeal to a

higher court and made inflammatory statements like, "It is a threat to the economic future of our whole region." He has not been able to show in any concrete manner how wilderness water rights would even affect—let alone harm—any existing water users.

Such concrete facts about the effect of wilderness water rights may yet result from a Colorado state study which Senator Hart and Representatives Ken Kramer and Hank Brown (both R.-Colorado) requested. Where was Armstrong or his crony, Representative Mike Strang, in that request? Do they really care about such facts?

In his election campaigns, Armstrong successfully portrays himself as a moderate who listens to a vast cross-section of public opinion. But when it gets down to the nitty-gritty, you can be sure he will always choose the option that will turn a profit for someone. Mining takes automatic precedence over wilderness; ranchers have special rights of access to wilderness unavailable to the general public; Motorcyclists can intrude the wilds while Congress studies; loggers can cut into lands that should become wilderness.

He is truly no moderate. He's as radical as James Watt.

-Gary Sprung