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The Bureau of Land Management, by Marion Clawson and America's Land and Its Uses, by Marion Clawson

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The Bureau of Land Management

By
MARION CLAWSON
Praeger, 1971
209 pp. \$8.50, Illus.

America's Land and Its Uses

By
MARION CLAWSON
Johns Hopkins Press, 1972
166 pp. \$8.50, Illus.

The first of these volumes is a contribution of the Praeger Library of U.S. Government Departments and Agencies; the second is sponsored by the Ford-funded Resources for the Future. Together they make up an invaluable background manual in responsible citizenship. The destiny of our country, if history can be trusted, depends heavily upon our treatment of the space in which we live, our land and its resources.

Following a career of public service in Agriculture and Interior, Marion Clawson served as Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), 1948-53. He has subsequently engaged in economic research in foreign countries and is now with Resources for the Future. This organization has long been engaged with the economic aspects of conservation. More recently it has emphasized the vital but neglected problem of viewing economics in the light of ecology.

Both volumes are remarkable for the amount of information they present in compact and readable style. If one did no more than examine the charts, maps and tables, giving each the attention it deserves, he would have a better grasp of our nation's history than the average citizen possesses.

One of the clichés only too familiar to those aware of environmental problems is "My God, if things are as bad as that, the government will surely do something about it." This touching and passive bit of faith ignores the fact that our government was conceived with the idea that it should reflect the will of the people, a unique revolution in history. Unfortunately, the treatment of our basic resource, the land, has reflected more of our vices, notably greed, indifference, and ignorance, than of our virtues.

The Bureau of Land Management has at length evolved from a long and confused history of government agencies. It has charge of

areas of the public domain that are under the Department of the Interior, as distinct from those under the Department of Agriculture administered by the Forest Service. Of the 755 million acres of public land, 470 million are administered by the Bureau of Land Management, while 187 million are under the Forest Service.

Until late in the 19th century, the choicest land was being absorbed by those who saw in it the prospects of immediate profit. Chart I in the record of the Bureau of Land Management begins with the acquisition of public lands following our separation from Great Britain and ends with the very recent period of attempts at intensive management.

Most of this time was given to disposing of these lands, very little to their proper care in the public interest. Disposal, in its intent, was a sound enough idea, consonant with the principle of individual freedom based upon giving each citizen a stake in the game, a reaction against feudal patterns in the Old World. Distribution was chiefly in the form of homesteads and huge grants to much-needed railroads, as well as mineral concessions. But in practice, this action was marked by an amount of fraud that dwarfs all governmental scandals in duration and extent.

Serious reservation of public lands began in 1872, reaching a maximum during the reign of Theodore I, to be shortly slowed down by congressional action. This action, of course, is a reflection of the insistent local and corporate pressures against which both the BLM and the Forest Service have had to carry on, and still do. Even the Wilderness Act of 1964 has holes through which a flock of sheep, herd of cattle, or a fleet of mining equipment can be driven.

At long last a counter-force has arisen from a slowly aroused public concern with the waste of natural resources and the demand of a predominantly urban, highly mobile population for recreational space. But even so, funds and personnel for the intensive management of public lands is woefully inadequate. I am reminded of a private landowner whom I visited in Denmark. He kept fifty men profitably employed the year around in his forest, small on the American scale. This is in contrast to a single public servant in our own country who may be responsible for thousands of acres of forest or range land.

A striking feature of both volumes is the extent and diversity of uses that call for expert management of the public domain. These include timber production, mining, recreation, wildlife management and grazing. Of the latter it has been said that the Forest Service is the greatest shepherd since the days of Abraham, a comment also

applied to a private owner, the late Senator Warren from Wyoming.

The chairman of a state Democratic committee once told me that he would like nothing better after his retirement than to write a school text on Civics, giving the facts of life as they really are. As a chapter in such a book, I would include the capsule history of land use in America contained in *AMERICA'S LAND AND ITS USES*. And on the library shelves of every school in this country, I would give space for both of the volumes under review.

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