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## BOOK REVIEWS

### *The Federal Lands Since 1956*

By

MARION CLAWSON

Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press for Resources for the Future. 1967

Pp. xi, 113, \$4.00

Unusual courage is required for a forecaster to look back at how history has treated his predictions. Thus, our first task is to salute Marion Clawson. *The Federal Lands Since 1956* examines the projections from 1956 to 1980 that he and Burnell Heald presented in *The Federal Lands: Their Use and Management*.<sup>1</sup> Analysis of the accuracy of their projections and the reasons for the deviations between expected and actual developments provides an instructive way to summarize recent public land use and management.

We are also indebted to Resource for The Future, Inc. for this supplement to the 1957 volume, because it updates the land use and management data and revises the projections. A wealth of scattered statistical series are brought together in one convenient and useful document.

From an overall viewpoint, the Clawson-Held projections accorded well with actual trends. The major attention of the new supplement is devoted to four unanticipated developments. First, since 1956 there has been a significant increase in the use of federal lands, particularly for recreation. Second, there have been significant changes in federal timber production. Between 1956 and 1964 the total U.S. harvest of timber was roughly constant but the cut from federal lands increased from about 8 billion board feet to over 13 billion. Thus, the relative role of the federal government in timber production increased. In 1956, however, the formerly pronounced upward trend in stumpage prices leveled off. Since then, there have been fluctuations in timber prices but no discernible trend.

Third, there has been a dramatic increase in oil production from federal lands, particularly from the outer continental shelf. Oil production on all federal lands more than doubled but the production of the submerged lands increased nine-fold.

Fourth, the financial situation of the federal lands has changed greatly. Revenues from users have risen with much of the increase

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1. M. Clawson & B. Heald, *The Federal Lands: Their Use and Management* (1957).

2. M. Clawson, *The Federal Lands Since 1956*, at 2 (1967).

due to petroleum output. The oil revenue projections, however, are hazardous due to periodic sales of long term leases. The leveling off of stumpage prices meant that some revenue increases projected by Clawson and Held did not occur. Also, the policy of free use or nominal charges for federal recreational facilities resulted in the large increases in visits to federal lands having a less than proportional impact on user-receipts.

Regardless, the funds available annually for federal agencies have grown substantially—about 300 percent—due to much enhanced support from Congress. As Dr. Clawson puts it, “The dramatic financial change since 1956 has been the very sharp increase in total appropriations, and hence in total expenditures for these lands—far beyond what we thought in 1957 was either possible or desirable.”<sup>2</sup>

These developments are documented and discussed but frustration as well as enlightenment results. The reader is taken up to but not into various vital analytical and policy issues. In part, this treatment is because the author has discussed many of the issues elsewhere. In part, however, the treatment is because the data are not really adequate to support analytical or policy discussions. To consider such issues, Dr. Clawson would have had to go far beyond the numbers that are the book's subject.

Dr. Clawson is quite aware of this problem. The supplement ends by emphasizing conclusions in the 1967 volume that while the federal lands are “big business,” they are not run by desirable economic and managerial procedures. One reason for this situation is that the data system and the accounting for land use and management activities are not conducive to sound decision making. In the hope of better decisions, Dr. Clawson presents an illustrative “first-cut” at a financial statement for all federal lands. He suggests that federal agencies should devote attention to refining this approach.

This prescription might be worse than the ill. Clearly the current land management information system is uninformative, misleading, and counterproductive. Clearly, also, much improvement in management and policy making is needed, and better data are a prerequisite. Nonetheless, a focus on the financial accounting of capital expenditures, operating expenditures, and receipts can be equally uninformative, misleading, and counterproductive. The federal lands are a “big business,” but their goal is not just to maximize the discounted stream of net cash receipts from users. To do this would imply that mineral production, ski lifts and other intensive-recreational facilities, and timber cutting are socially more desirable than wilderness, the preservation of natural beauty, and general habitat

and environmental improvements. Many citizens would put the relative social desirabilities the other way around.

Dr. Clawson emphasizes that social benefits other than revenue are produced by public lands. In his financial statement he allows for the estimated value of goods sold at less than full market price. Nor are revenues unimportant; indeed, they are very important and should be increased through higher use fees. Particularly desirable would be higher user fees for recreation on public lands. But any financial accounting system should be embedded in a larger social accounting system such as a planning-programing-budgeting system that explicitly allows costs to be linked to both financial and nonfinancial objectives in a more direct fashion. Simply crediting financial accounts with some estimated nonmarket benefits doesn't meet this need.

In short, this supplement study is a very useful contribution. It not only summarizes the use and financing of the public lands, but it indicates the pressing need for more and much better management information systems in the national resources sector. Such a framework is needed if financial data are to be able to provide a helpful basis for analysis and decision-making.

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