

The cowboy remains a romantic icon for Idaho and the West. But as Idaho and the West evolve, other interests challenge the tradition of nearly unrestricted use of the public lands by ranchers, loggers and miners. Today this conflict has generated more contention than compromise, exemplified by Earth First! on one side and the Wise Use movement on the other. In this issue of *FOCUS* we examine this new battle between the Old West and the New West.

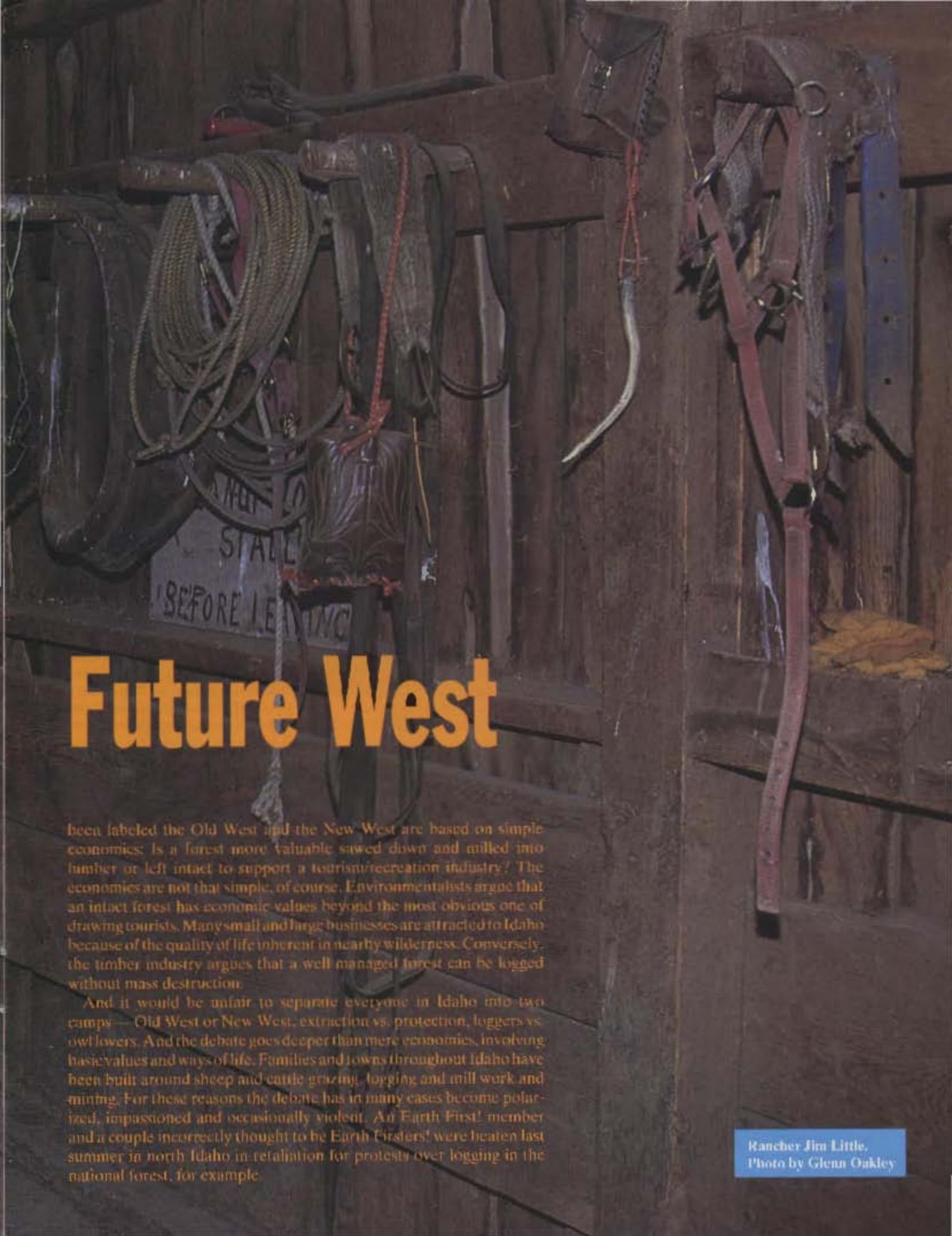
The Once and

On the Van Dusen Ranch below Squaw Butte no rain has fallen all of March, the irrigation reservoir is barely half full, and somewhere on the upper winter pasture is sick black-and-white calf that Jim Little can't find. But it's other things that trouble the third-generation Idaho rancher most these days: public lands grazing reform, endangered species designations, Clean Water Act amendments.

To Little, a 1967 Boise State accounting graduate, naive city folks are meddling in one of the state's most valuable and important industries. To a growing number of environmentalists, it's about time ranchers and other commodity users start sharing the public domain.

Throughout Idaho the "traditional" economies of ranching, logging and mining are being challenged by those who see the future of the state lies in saving the public forests and range rather than in continuing to extract resources from them. At one level this battle between what has

By Glenn Oakley



Future West

been labeled the Old West and the New West are based on simple economics: Is a forest more valuable sawed down and milled into lumber or left intact to support a tourism/recreation industry? The economies are not that simple, of course. Environmentalists argue that an intact forest has economic values beyond the most obvious one of drawing tourists. Many small and large businesses are attracted to Idaho because of the quality of life inherent in nearby wilderness. Conversely, the timber industry argues that a well managed forest can be logged without mass destruction.

And it would be unfair to separate everyone in Idaho into two camps— Old West or New West, extraction vs. protection, loggers vs. owl lovers. And the debate goes deeper than mere economics, involving basic values and ways of life. Families and towns throughout Idaho have been built around sheep and cattle grazing, logging and mill work and mining. For these reasons the debate has in many cases become polarized, impassioned and occasionally violent. An Earth First! member and a couple incorrectly thought to be Earth Firsters! were beaten last summer in north Idaho in retaliation for protests over logging in the national forest, for example.

Rancher Jim Little,
Photo by Glenn Oakley



The New West is impacting the Old Western ways of small towns throughout Idaho. Above, St. Anthony.

Ideologies aside, Idaho is changing. The Idaho Department of Commerce's report, *Profile of Rural Idaho*, notes the unmistakable trend: "The state was 100 percent rural until 1920, when the city of Boise reached a population of 21,393 ... Eighteen Idaho counties, all rural, saw population declines in the 1980s. ... Recent population growth has been twice as fast in urban areas."

The report identifies a corresponding change in the economy: "Over the years, service industries and trade have replaced natural resource industries as the largest employers in Idaho. While agriculture, timber and mining activities still play a vital role in the state's economy, these industries no longer employ the large percentage of the population they once did due to production efficiencies and changes in the overall economy," the report said.

State senator John Peavey, a Carey rancher and candidate for lieutenant governor, believes the challenge is to "preserve the best of the old and still approach natural resource issues with a recognition that there are limits."

Kent Laverty, who is working for the Idaho Conservation League on sustainable economy issues, agrees. The big question at hand, he says, is "how we're going to preserve Idaho for our children and have jobs at the same time." Laverty says that bigger goal is lost in "solving the debate of the moment — grazing reform or endangered species. ... If you can get people together talking face to face and not through the press you have a better chance of creating a compromise."

But there is more conflict than conversation in Idaho because both sides of the New West-Old West battle feel beleaguered. National environmental regulations and chang-

ing global economics at the national level impact the traditional industries in Idaho, where 63 percent of the land is public domain.

But Idaho politics retain a solidly Old West ethic that often favors the traditional industries when their interests are at stake.

For instance, when Jon Marvel, a Hailey architect and director of the Idaho Watersheds Project, bid on a state lands grazing lease early this year so he could remove cattle from the land to let it recover from decades of grazing, the state government stopped him. The Idaho Land Board first accepted his bid on the 640-acre parcel in Custer County, then voted to rescind the bid, granting rancher Will Ingram a new 10-year lease. The Idaho Cattle Association and the Idaho Woolgrowers Association then drafted a bill prohibiting anyone other than livestock grazers to bid on state grazing leases. The Idaho Legislature passed the bill, although it was vetoed by Gov. Cecil Andrus.

Idaho Conservation League lobbyist Melinda Harm suggests that the Idaho Legislature is "the last stand of the resource extraction industry. The forest industry is on

'How are we going to preserve Idaho for our children and have jobs at the same time?'

the ropes in the court system on the federal level. The state is the last place to have control and they're making hay while the sun shines." She says, "The bill that best represented the environmental nature" of the Legislature was House Bill 728, which was

directed at Earth First!-type protests, making it a felony to obstruct the lawful harvest of timber. It passed the House unanimously and had only four dissenting votes in the Senate. Conversely, a bill to protect the Boise River was not introduced into committee in the House despite passage in the Senate.

Idaho Mining Association executive director Jack Lyman says, "It would be fair to label the attitude [of state and federal regulatory agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency] as one of grudging approval [of resource-based industries.] ... The primary reason in the '80s and '90s for the decline in mining was price related. Today, however, I think it isn't expanding as fast as it could because of environmental attitudes." He says that although two new gold mines are opening in Idaho, mining companies are increasingly focusing on foreign projects where the mines face less opposition and regulations.

Still, Harm says, "There are points of common ground and we need to work on them when we can ... No one wants to get rid of the Old West. What we've always said is we need to do these things responsibly." Industry representatives say almost the same thing. "We've never viewed it as an either/or proposition," says Lyman.

"I'm not willing to concede that mining isn't part of the New West. And mining conducted today isn't like mining conducted 70 years ago. ... The challenge for us is to educate the populous and fight the battles."

Conservationists and industry represen-

tatives did work together during the last legislative session to create a state endangered species act program aimed at heading off federal listing of species by protecting their environment before populations drop to critical levels. "One thing we can agree with industry is that when a species is listed, nobody wins," Harms says, noting that Idaho Timber Industry lobbyist Joe Hinson helped draft the bill. The bill had the support of a host of industry organizations but died under opposition from the Idaho Farm Bureau. Jim Yost, director of the bureau and a 1971 BSU graduate, says his organization opposed the bill because it expanded powers of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Still, there remains a skepticism that service-based economies will be unable to support communities at the same level as resource industries used to. Lyman nods toward a hefty chunk of silver-gray galena ore on his office coffee table and says, "That's wealth. You don't get it by cutting someone's hair so he can pay you so you can buy a burger so the guy who's flipping the burger can rent a video. You circulate money that way, but wealth is created from the Earth.

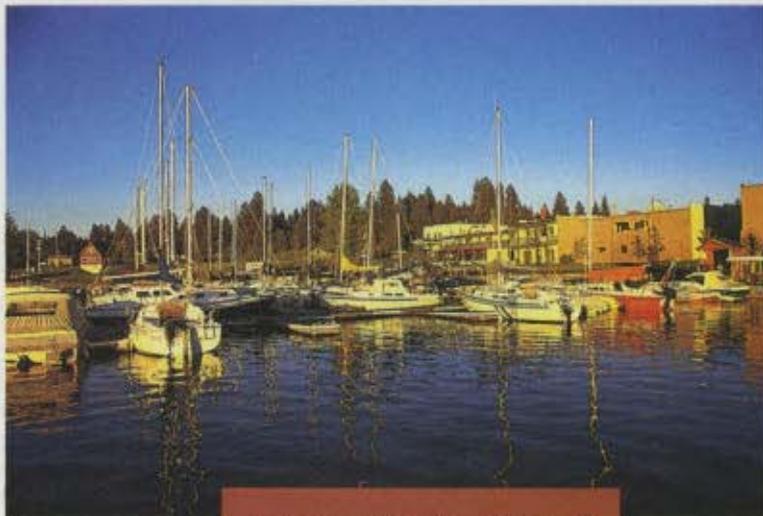
"The average wage to a miner is \$35,000 a year," he says. "And the average wage paid to an average worker in the tourism industry is \$7,600 a year. So if the miner has to give way to the New West, we have to have four tourism workers for every miner we put out of work."

"Rural Idaho's future lies in recreation-based, amenity-based economies," counters Pat Ford, a leading Idaho environmentalist. And that will be a much more diverse and healthy economy if we can get there." Besides, he adds, "New isn't good and Old isn't bad. Primarily it's one of inevitable ties, not shoulds or shouldn'ts." Ford says the Old West-New West fight is diverting attention from the real issues of economic and environmental stability and opportunities are being bypassed in the process. Fiber optic availability will be more important to Challis than whatever happens to grazing fees, predicts Ford, who sees electronically linked entrepreneurs as a viable economic force in the near future.

Ron Hall, director of the Idaho Small Business Development Center at BSU, agrees with that assessment. Hall and his associates have been working in small resource-dominated communities throughout Idaho, helping individuals establish new businesses. "Probably 40 percent of the new ventures and new entrepreneurs are people

who are leaving one of the natural resource industries because the jobs are being cut back or terminated or they see that coming down the line," says Hall.

Hall thinks that in many communities the traditional industries will remain "a major component of the economy." But he thinks all communities will have to diversify their economic base and warns, "Things are going to get worse if you're in one of those resource industries." Hall says a fiber optics infrastructure may indeed be more significant to rural communities than the environmental debates over which they now spin and turn. "Look at what happened when they put the freeways in and the major changes in the ways communities developed," he says. "I think the whole deal with fiber optics is another freeway. If it doesn't



Some towns that have depended on traditional resource industries switched to a tourist-based economy. Above, McCall.

go by your community or your business you're in trouble."

Hall says the willingness of communities to seek alternate industries and businesses is a direct reflection of the community leaders' openness. In Adams County, says Hall, the community leaders have involved young people who are more responsive to change. Among the small businesses started in the town of Council are a maker of custom knives, quilts and furniture. To the north in the Silver Valley, where mining was once the single driving economy, tourism is being developed. But only after prolonged resistance, says Hall, where many of the laid-off miners believed the mines would come back. Ironically, one of the burgeoning industries in the Silver Valley today is cleaning up the massive toxic residue left by decades of mining and smelting.

If the Old West is disappearing, BSU political science professor John Freemuth asks,

"What is the New West supposed to be like? Denver? I hope not. It's not Sun Valley — it's a playground for the rich. Is it Boise? We're already worried."

Both sides generally agree that there is room for both Old West and New West businesses, but they rarely agree on the terms. But as the urban population booms, summer cabin sprawl is causing some environmentalists to reconsider the impacts of industrial tourism. Little suggests that ranchers can serve the interests of environmentalists by staying in business and keeping open spaces open.

"I understand that they think this should all be their playground," he says of urbanites. "They can work in a city for an electronics firm all week and then go out on the weekend and don't want any cows to get in their way." He adds that if the ranchers are forced out of business they will sell their land and their water rights "and the backpackers won't like it."

Conversely, some ranchers are taking advantage of the urban growth to increase and diversify their income by selling hunting privileges and offering wildlife viewing tours.

The ICL's Lavery says, "I don't think it's a case of wanting to kick the rancher off. It's wanting them to manage their land. I'm a fourth generation Idahoan. My grandfather was a cattleman. He cares about the land. ... There's as much

education needed on both sides of the fence. Conservationists need to understand and listen to people who are living off the land, and vice versa."

Lavery says that creating a new economy must "be locally driven. The community has to decide its future." And while Lavery argues the logging rates of the 1980s were too high to be sustainable, he wants logging to continue in Idaho. "With Washington and Oregon timber companies outbidding Idaho mills, we're looking at helping the small mill owners" gain more timber contracts by amending bidding regulations governing the size of mills, he says. Similarly, conservation groups like the ICL want to ban log exports, which would keep the milling jobs in America.

Peavey says, "If you look back 20-25 years there were very few people who cared about the management of our resources. ... I think we've got to change and accommodate each other." He sees the most likely areas of compromise on the local level, although he admits, "I'd be hard-pressed to point out a success story there, but they're coming. There's too much at stake." □