

What are the issues that Idaho faces in the changing world of the new century? To answer that question, FOCUS writer Kathleen Mortensen called on John Freemuth, a professor of political science, senior fellow for the Cecil Andrus Center for Public Policy and chair of the science advisory board of the Bureau of Land Management. Here, in capsule form, are his views about issues that are changing the face of Idaho.

Resource ealities

ow do we balance conflicting views of resource uses? Will Idaho always be a state where these interests compete?

The conflict in the short term will probably continue because of the different values underpinning environmental issues. For instance, some people think that responsibly cutting trees is good for the economy. Others think you should never cut a tree in a national forest. In the long term, what removes the conflict is some underlying consensus view of what national forests are for. If they're more to be protected, then we'll log less. But we need to examine our consumer habits, too. Consumerism is what drives economic growth, and if we don't log, where will we get our wood?

The same dynamic occurs with other issues, from grazing to dam breaching. We're so in the middle of these issues

that we forget we've had phases and changes throughout our history. We just need to find out where we can agree and where we're not going to agree.

ive us a brief overview of the three major resource industries in Idaho — timber, mining and agriculture.

I think Idahoans, more than the country as a whole, would still support logging in national forests, but it's becoming a harder sell. We in Idaho don't rely on logging as much as we used to, and our newcomers generally don't come from small towns where logging is an economic way of life.

As an industry, mining depends a lot on the price of minerals. Right now, it's often not profitable. The veins are gone from most of Idaho's gold mines, which means they would have to do things such as leach it out of the rock, and that's more expensive. And you can never be sure how long the mine is going to last.

As for agriculture, corporate agriculture is doing well, but the family farm we all grew up with is changing. Smalf family farms have been bought out. Prices go down and they can't afford to make it, so they sell out to some corporation, or their land gets subdivided. So while agriculture is still very important to the Idaho economy, it's less so than at other times in our history.

hat do these industries mean to Idaho's future?

Idaho is becoming a lot less Jeffersonian and a lot more Hamiltonian. We're about big industry, and the yeoman farmer, rancher, logger—it's harder for those people now. It's change that none of us can control and it affects all of us. We're seeing one example right now—the stock market is down in response to rising unemployment. The old depressions in Idaho used to be agriculture and resource-based. But

what drives the economic growth now is hightech and service industries. Now that we're seeing a high-tech slowdown, it is clear that the global economy is linked with all of this.

The paradox is that on one hand Idaho was working its way out of its reliance on the agricultural and resource industries, but now we still find ourselves dependent on forces outside of our own state. Micron is doing well but can't isolate itself from chip prices. The lesson, I suppose, is that we are a more economically diverse state and we're not going to go back to being ag-based. People move to places like Boise because they think there will be more job opportunities. That really changes the demographic makeup of Idaho.

When Idaho was experiencing an economic boom of sorts last year, it wasn't rural Idaho that boomed. It was Coeur d'Alene, Sun Valley, Ketchum, Idaho Falls — rural Idaho did not boom. Those little towns are smaller now than they once were, and that's a big problem.

there are opposing values.
Let's analyze just one —
salmon recovery and the role of dam
breaching.

The mystifying thing to me is that we surveyed people for three years in a row, and they were fairly divided over breaching — 40 percent on each side of the issue, with 20 percent undecided. Now public opinion has suddenly moved against breaching — 57 percent against breaching, with 35 percent supporting it. Was it because people were angry at the Clinton administration? That the dam breaching opponents did a better job telling their story? I don't know.

But it's got to be the public who decides whether or not to save the salmon. Science has concluded that breaching the dams is the best way to save the salmon, but if the public doesn't want to save the salmon, if they dig in their heels, how are they going to get those dams breached?

To most Idahoans, the salmon are a symbol of a wild Idaho. But to certain other interests, such as the farmers who transport their wheat by barge, it's clearly an economic issue. And there's a whole industry that protects salmon in order to fish for them. As long as they're being protected, it's a renewable resource and a viable industry.

Everybody talks about saving the salmon, but what people haven't sorted out is what it would cost and how much of that they're willing to bear.

ow have public attitudes changed in the last 40 or 50 years?

Forty years ago it was all about building things, producing power, creating jobs and conquering the wilderness. Now, 40 years down the road, those values are not as dominant. We look at what the costs will be, both economically and environmentally. The twist in Idaho has been that a lot of our influx has been conservative people. And they're different than the more traditional conservatives like Phil Batt who are concerned with fiscal responsibility and the wise use of resources. The new conservatives are more in-your-face moralists. So it creates conflict.

As we have diversified in terms of what we do to make a living, we're less dependent on resource extraction in our own experiences. For instance, a lot of people who are engineers at Micron might be outdoorsmen, but they don't see why you ought to be cutting trees in national forests. One hundred years ago, it wasn't like that. The environmental movement was just getting started.

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