

CONSERVATION NEWS AND NOTES

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The Ostrander constitutional amendment has passed both Houses of the Legislature for the second time. This measure would amend Article 14, Section 2, of the State Constitution by striking out the provision that the Legislature may provide for the use of forest preserve lands for the construction of reservoirs to regulate the flow of streams. It would make it impossible to undertake a stream control project in the forest preserve, such as Panther Dam, without further amendment of the constitution.

The Ostrander amendment will be voted upon at the general election next November. It will be necessary for you to give it your most enthusiastic support at that time. The strong opposition which the amendment met in the committees in both Houses of the Legislature this year indicates that it will have vigorous opposition at the polls.

As expected, no action was taken by the Legislature in regard to use of the forest preserve lands which is being studied by the Milroe Committee of eighteen. It is not anticipated that the committee will be prepared to render a report to the Legislature until 1954. As you know, the committee is investigating the proposal to change the present constitutional provision that the State forest preserve lands should be kept "forever wild."

On the national scene there are several matters which require our attention. It is becoming increasingly apparent that certain interests have interpreted the results of last November's election as an invitation to lay hands on the nation's natural resources. At least they are seeking to take advantage of the change in administration to put through measures which are against the public interest but favorable to their selfish interests.

One bill (S. 82), introduced by Senator Guy Gordon of Oregon, would open wildlife refuge lands and national forest lands to exploration and entry under the mineral land laws. This is pending before the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, of which Senator Hugh Butler is Chairman. Another bill (S. 134) would permit the former owners of submarginal lands which had been acquired by the federal government, to buy back the mineral interests for only 25% of the consideration paid by the government for the property. These submarginal lands are the kind set aside for wildlife refuges.

Of even greater importance is the legislation introduced on behalf of western livestock interests. They have had introduced two identical bills, S. 1491 and H. R. 4023, under which the livestock owners would obtain practically the same benefits, insofar as grazing is concerned, that they would have under complete ownership of the land. The bills contain provisions which would grant to those presently enjoying grazing privileges first preference for continued use of the privileges. In addition, the legislation would permit them to transfer their grazing privileges, thus restricting the grazing privileges to the present permittees and successors of their own choosing, and resulting in a vested right contrary to the public interest.

Under other sections of these identical bills, grazing privileges would be administered in most part by local boards which would determine the percentage and kind of livestock to be grazed, thereby weakening the power of the federal government to manage and protect timber and watershed lands in the national forests.