Fed Land Transfer Wisdom Eyed

Dear Sir:

I read with interest Mr. Spurrier's answer to Mr. Young's letter in The New Mexican on the subject of the disposition of public lands. Mr. Spurrier reproaches Mr. Young for being uninformed on the subject. Neither of them dealt with the matter on a basis of information, but rather from the point of view of opinion and belief.

Mr. Young believes in continuing federal administration of the public lands, whereas Mr. Spurrier thinks that the interest of the people would be better served by turning them over to the State of New Mexico, or selling them to private individuals at their appraised value. He does not say, however, who is to appraise them or on what basis the appraisal will be conducted. These are difficulties not easy to resolve as is evident from the differences of opinion that arise in condemnation proceedings. It is only Mr. Spurrier's opinion that the transaction will be fair. But it is doubtful that the interest of all the people can be delivered at any price into the hands of an individual. Mr. Young apparently feels that it cannot and in this I agree with him.

Contrary to Mr. Spurrier's optimism that the public rights in recreation, hunting and fishing can be protected on the transfered land, it is unlikely that private owners would long countenance keeping their property open for public use. As Mr. Spurrier has already changed the word right to privilege so private owners would soon proceed towards further restrictions. The history of pivate land owneship has not been one of continuing public access.

As for the revenue of 37½% from Federal Land to the State of New Mexico I wonder whether a tax of this amount would be possible on a private operation. The Forest Service policy is one of multiple use of the National Forests, which includes, besides recreation, grazing, lumbering and mineral resource development. These activities when privately conducted under leases for profit are taxable.

It is my opinion that continued federal administration of public lands best serves the interests of all the people, not just the people of New Mexico, than would state administration or private ownership.

Yours truly,
Eliot Porter