

On the Green Front by Rogelio A. Maduro

A fishy tale

The state of Idaho is in an uproar over a judge's ruling to place the "rights" of salmon above those of human beings.

Those who think they have seen everything may wish to travel to Idaho. As this column was being written, thousands of miners, ranchers, and loggers there were on the verge of being thrown out of work because of a fish. Actually, the fish is the excuse: They are facing this disaster because of stalling by two federal bureaucracies, an insane judge in Hawaii, and a suit filed by the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund. At the center of this storm is the belief that salmon have more rights than do human beings.

The story reached a crisis point on Jan. 12, when U.S. District Court Judge Dan Ezra ruled on a suit brought by the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund for "failure of the Forest Service to review forest plans . . . in light of the listing of salmon as endangered." Judge Ezra ruled that no economic activity could be carried out in the area until this issue were resolved. The backlash caused by the early implementation of this court order forced the judge to allow a temporary stay until Jan. 28. This is supposed to allow the National Marine Fisheries Service to carry out a review of the National Forest Service plans to protect the salmon. However, no one expects the review to be done on time.

Judge Ezra's ruling bars all economic activities in six huge national forests in Idaho, which together are larger than the state of Maryland. The ruling states that all grazing, logging, mining, and road-building activities in central Idaho must be halted until further notice.

The state of Idaho is in an uproar, with thousands of people taking to the

streets to demonstrate. The national forests affected are: Nez Perce, Sawtooth, Payette, Salmon, Boise, and Challis. The ruling will shut down 190 active mines, deny 532 grazing permits, and prohibit the logging of tens of millions of board feet of timber under contract.

Judge Ezra, who sits in Hawaii, stated in his ruling: "It is clear that the USFS [U.S. Forest Service] must be enjoined from announcing, awarding, permitting or conducting any new timber sales, range activities, mining activities or road building projects until formal consultation on the LRMPs [land and resource management plans] is completed. Under the circumstances, the court is also compelled to enter an injunction against all ongoing and announced activities."

There has been no discussion of the fact that the greatest threat to the salmon comes from the enormous increase in the population of sea lions. These voracious salmon-eaters are wiping out the fish as they return to spawn. The seal population exploded following a ban on all hunting of marine mammals because of their "threatened" or "endangered" status.

Idaho Sen. Dirk Kempthorne sent a desperate plea to President Clinton on Jan. 20 to stop the execution of Judge Ezra's ruling. The letter implored the President to "act quickly and decisively to resolve this internal disagreement within the federal government, complete the required approvals, and relieve our own citizens from this crisis."

Kempthorne told Clinton that

"men and women are being immediately laid off from their jobs in mines, lumber mills and throughout the service industry by direct order of the U.S. Forest Service." Within a few days, he said, many families "may not be able to feed themselves or their children, or even to heat their homes." Kempthorne asked Clinton to "explore the possibility of emergency aid to these affected communities for the immediate future to provide for their basic needs."

Bumper stickers with the slogan "Hungry and Out of Work? Eat an Environmentalist," have appeared on cars all over Idaho. In many threatened towns, almost as many people have turned out to protest as there are registered residents. A local veterinarian told 350 demonstrators at the town of Challis, "Our lives are about to explode and disappear." Chuck Wildes, forest supervisor for the Salmon-Challis National Forest, was so afraid that he had to be pushed to the stage to address the crowd and explain to them the plans of the Forest Service.

On the other side, environmentalists are gloating. According to the *Idaho Falls Register*, environmentalists are saying that "as painful as it may be for ranchers to quit grazing livestock, loggers to quit cutting logs or miners to quit mining ore . . . the Forest Service has to fulfill its job under the Endangered Species Act."

Judge Ezra's ruling sets a very dangerous precedent. The decision is based on the failure of two federal agencies to collaborate with each other. As an Idaho industrialist told *EIR*, this means that all the green "moles" in the federal government can make sure studies are not carried out, leaving the door open for their associates in the environmental groups to sue and shut down all production in any part of the United States they wish to target.