

The following material was abstracted from an [article](#) originally found at the web site of the Environmental Working Group.

Policy Objectives of the Wise Use Movement

There are two basic tenets that serve as the driving force and uniting theme for the Wise Use movement:

- ***All constraints on the use of private property should be removed***, including limits set for health, safety, and environmental protection.

At the heart of the issue is the "takings" clause of the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which states "...nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation."

Property-rights advocates argue that regulations that restrict an owner's use of his or her land are a taking, and hence, the property owner must be duly compensated.

Regulations do not constitute a taking, however, when the restrictions act to prevent public harm (such as regulations preventing a property owner from releasing pollutants into a community) or if the benefits of the regulation outweigh the burdens. For example, while a zoning ordinance limiting building might place some restrictions on an individual, the same ordinance might in turn provide benefits that outweigh the inconvenience of the restrictions to neighboring property owners.

The practical result of the takings argument is that if the courts validate the argument, environmental, health, and safety regulations will be impossible to impose because unconditional compensation is not fiscally plausible. (See page 16 for resources on private property cases and legislation.)

Private-property-rights advocates have been touting the result in a widely publicized case in South Carolina that was decided by the Supreme Court in June 1993. David Lucas, a developer, was not allowed to build on two seaside lots because the state restricted coastal development. The Supreme Court reversed a lower court's rejection of his "takings" claim, and the state ultimately settled the case for approximately \$1.5 million. While symbolically important, the result in Lucas is consistent with the traditional rule that a "taking" occurs when regulation makes property completely valueless.

- ***Access to public land should be unrestricted*** for logging, mining, drilling, motorized recreation, and all commercial enterprise.

"Wilderness has no economic value, no timbering, no oil and gas production, no mining, no livestock grazing, no motorized recreation."

-- Henry Yake, President, BlueRibbon Coalition,
Times Herald, July 15, 1990.

This misconstrued philosophy is the basis of the Wise Use movement's public-lands policy. Their public relations campaign touts its objectives as multiple use of public lands. In reality, however, their objectives limit public access and do not promote economic stability. For example, the mining industry would close off public lands to recreational users, and the timber industry would limit access on public lands to hunters and hikers. The economic realities, distorted by the Wise Use agenda, are discussed in AFE's publication, Jobs and the Environment, developed as a companion to this guide on the Wise Use movement.

Aspects of the political agenda that specifically relate to public-lands policy include opposition to the designation of any lands as wilderness areas; immediate logging of all old-growth forests; opening all public lands --including wilderness areas and national parks -- to mineral and energy production; and developing massive concessions in all national parks.

The Agenda

Although Wise Use organizations differ in their specific focus, at a conference in August 1988 sponsored by Ron Arnold's Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise, many Wise Use organizations came together and discussed their mutual concerns. Out of this conference Alan Gottlieb, also of the Center for Defense of Free Enterprise, compiled The Wise Use Agenda, a book that delineates the following twenty-five goals of the movement.

1. Initiate a public education project to demonstrate how Wise Use of the national forests and federal lands can reduce the federal deficit.
2. Develop the petroleum resources of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.
3. Advocate the passage of an Inholders Protection Act, giving broader property rights to inholders (persons who own land within the borders or tangent to federal or state lands).
4. Support the Global Warming Protection Act, a misleading name for legislation that seeks to increase the young stands (i.e., removal of old-growth stands) in National Forest lands.
5. Increase harvesting of timber in the Tongass National Forest in Alaska.
6. Open all public lands to mining and energy production.
7. Assert states' sovereign rights in matters pertaining to water distribution and regulation.
8. Commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Forest Service by calling attention to the commodity use of forests and the homestead settlement of these areas in the early years of the Service.
9. Increase harvesting of trees in national forests to promote "rural, timber-dependent community stability" through the Rural Community Stability Act.
10. Create a national timber harvesting system that allows for greater harvesting of timber on public lands.
11. Reorganize the National Park Service. This includes the implementation of Mission 2010, a 20-year construction program that would maximize concession stands and accommodations in national parks, and remove entry limits and bring in private firms experienced in people moving, such as Walt Disney, to manage the parks.
12. Expand the window of time that a patent protects companies and individuals who develop new pest-control products by excluding the time spent testing the product.
13. Create the National Rangeland Grazing System to open more federal lands for grazing.
14. Open all wilderness areas to motorized wheelchair access.
15. Support the enactment of a National Industrial Policy Act requiring all Federal actions -- legislative and regulatory -- to include an economic impact statement.
16. Require greater specificity in the costs associated with actions by federal agencies.
17. Allow property owners to recover easements on property taken for railroad construction once the railroads have been abandoned.
18. Amend and weaken the Endangered Species Act. The amendment would exclude "relic species in decline before the appearance of man," such as the California Condor.
19. Require parties that unsuccessfully challenge any development or economic action in court to pay damages to the developer.

20. Strengthen the claims to private rights on federal lands for mining, grazing, harvesting timber, etc.
21. Press for the enactment of the Global Resources Wise Use Act, which calls for the adoption of a pro-industry consideration in natural resource-use decisions.
22. Change the National Wilderness Preservation System to allow for commercial uses. Reorganize areas so that some are designated for partial development while others are allowed more extensive development.
23. Allow Wise Use groups standing to sue on behalf of industries that are threatened or harmed by environmentalists.
24. Use monies from the federal gasoline tax to create trails for off-road motorized vehicles.
25. Discontinue the Forest Service's policy of allowing some naturally occurring fires to burn, and introduce an active prevention system.

The agenda items range from dramatic changes in wildlife management that allow for more commercial development of all kinds to measures that deceptively appear to promote preservation. The impact of many of the items is purposefully unclear, and this, in turn, obfuscates potential detrimental impact on the environment.

The agenda establishes a concrete legislative strategy for the movement. Unlike past attempts by resource-extraction industries, which floundered due to internal inconsistencies, the Wise Use agenda clearly sets out specific actions. It is important to note, however, that while the items establish specific goals and attempt to bring together dissimilar groups, there is still a great deal of disparity within the movement.

Legislative Action

Wise Use advocates have been active and in many cases successful in changing public opinion and translating their support into political and legislative action. Indeed, they have accomplished some of the goals that they set in 1988. Using a variety of tools, from economic boycotts to getting amendments attached to key pieces of legislation in Congress, Wise Use proponents have been very active. Here is a sample of actions that they have taken:

- Some groups organized an economic boycott of corporations sponsoring two television shows produced by the National Audubon Society on grazing and timber -- "Rage over Trees" and "The New Range Wars." They were successful in producing large volumes of mail from supporters, which prompted some sponsors to remove their advertisements.
- Wise Use proponents have packed federal hearings on land management in the Yellowstone area as well as hearings on the 1872 Mining Act, convened by the Mining and Natural Resources Subcommittee of the House of Representatives. In both cases they effectively used the hearings to show public support and attract media attention.
- The BlueRibbon Coalition, an off-road-vehicle, "multiple use" organization, orchestrated the Wise Use movement's biggest success to date. They were able to get an amendment added to the 1991 highway reauthorization bill that includes up to \$30 million dollars in gas-tax money to build off-road-vehicle trails. Under this legislation, trails for motorized vehicles can be made through previously roadless areas, decreasing the chances of these areas being protected under the Wilderness Act.

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This document was prepared by [Wild Wilderness](#). To learn more about ongoing industry-backed congressional efforts to motorize, commercialize, and privatize America's public lands, contact:

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