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# Lewiston Tribune

## OPINION: Land Board should consider restrictive covenants on sales

- Cindy Agidius
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Last week, my husband and I spent a few vacation days at Priest Lake. It is a special place for me. As soon as I drive out of the traffic in Coeur d'Alene, I feel like I am home, even though I haven't lived in that part of northern Idaho since high school.

Yet, there is something magic about the mountains and waters of Idaho that bring peace and relaxation to my soul. Our campground at Beaver Creek was a shady wonder. Each morning, as I lay snuggled up in my camper, I could hear the pleadings from the group of cyclists, all under the tender age of 10, as they waited anxiously to make their morning rounds, which was usually around 8 a.m. when their parents turned them loose.

Those sounds quickly took me back through the years, the sounds of children laughing, chipmunks in the trees, the game was the same, only my children were playing Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and these children were playing out the latest "Star Wars" plot, but always someone was yelling that big brother was not waiting.

Priest Lake is magnificent, as is Lake Pend Oreille. The beauty of northern Idaho is incredible. Unfortunately, it has been invaded by our neighbors to the west. With Washington parks closed for so long during COVID-19 they came east. One park official dubbed them the "COVID refugees."

This influx has made sleepy towns like Coolin and Priest River hives of traffic, something a little unexpected in that area. Idaho suffers (and benefits) to be a state that is roughly 61% federal lands. Including state-owned lands, this makes for slim tax rolls in many counties and often makes it difficult for local entities to have a stable tax base for our schools as well as necessities, but it has also left us with the most amazing gift of all, the land itself. It's a gift I'm not sure we would have recognized at statehood.

Since our beginnings, Idaho has sold about 40% of the land it was given. That is roughly 2 acres out of every 5. Over the past few years, beginning in the 1990s, Idaho legislators have sought to get out of the business of being landlords and have been getting rid of their/our commercial properties. The Idaho Land Board has placed numerous beautiful lake properties across the state up for sale, some have been small and some larger, but all commercial rentals.

State commercial properties have had an unfair advantage vs. privately held commercial properties as in the state does not have to pay property taxes, and that is a valid concern. Sales made by the state go to benefit our public schools and the Land Board is tasked with maximizing public lands for that benefit. But I think we need to seek a balance in these very radically changing times.

Idaho has had such an influx of people that I have no doubt the population increases in the Boise Valley have impacted our beautiful areas of recreation from Horseshoe Bend to McCall much as has happened up north. It is time to make sure any sales that occur will continue to preserve the attributes of the areas that have made them so popular and not destroy the rustic beauty of these places.

I have to wonder if the board has ever entertained putting restrictive covenants on some of those sales? By doing so, all parties could be served — the general public, the schools and the purchaser of said lands. Remember, no one is forcing these sales and there are very few waterfront properties for sale these days.

Top dollar would not be hard to get even with restrictions; they would just appeal to a different buyer. Somehow, as time goes by, the adage that land is finite begins to ring more true. In a state that has been professing its desire to attain more control and ownership of the federal lands within its borders, maybe it's time for a little more review of the "how" our public lands are sold.

I for one, want to know that when my children bring their families back to visit the lakes and rivers they grew up on, that they find them just as wonderful as are their memories.

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