

DEC 21 1978

# U.S. Land Grab Larger Than Thought

**L**AST WEEK this column referred to Uncle Sam as a "land grabber" in connection with the proposed federal takeover of 35,000 acres of land along Deep Fork river in central Oklahoma.

The description seems to have been appropriate, but the amount of land involved apparently was grossly understated.

After that item was written, the December issue of Conservative Digest magazine arrived, featuring a staff article entitled "The Big Federal Land Grab."

The magazine charges that "under determined prodding from environmentalists" the government is trying to lock up hundreds of millions of acres of public land in wilderness areas.

Under the program with the acronym RARE II (meaning Roadless Area Review and Evaluation, Phase 2), limitations would bar effective exploration for oil and gas and other uses.

Closed for public benefit would be 25 million acres of commercial tim-

ber and millions of acres now available for lease by ranchers for grazing. Snowmobiles would be banned.

"One must ask if large tracts of land should be reserved for a relatively few healthy backpackers and declared off limits to families whose young children or elderly members make backpacking impossible or who simply prefer taking their recreation close to their cars," the article ponders.

Because the federal government controls 345 million of Alaska's 370 million acres, this is a major battleground.

Alaskans are proud of their state's beauty, Conservative Digest says, but they resent controls that threaten to block development of oil, mining, timber and agriculture.

The Alaskan matter will be settled in Congress, but Uncle Sam's land grabbing in the lower 48 states is being carried on by federal bureaus under existing laws or through projects attached to related programs that may be desirable.

For example, Oklahoma City ur-

gently needs aid to build the McGee Creek water facility in Atoka County. The Bureau of Reclamation is contemplating acquisition of 20,000 acres of adjacent land for recreational purposes at a cost of \$9 million.

The Dallas men who own most of it might be willing to sell. If they do, the land may pass out of private ownership forever.

Another project under consideration is desalinization of the Arkansas and Red rivers by the Army Corps of Engineers, Tulsa district. This could improve quality of water on both streams.

However, preliminary studies indicate that about 65,000 acres, more than 100 square miles, would be taken over. Part of this would be acquired in fee, the rest by easements.

Oklahomans should be alert to what is happening. Some view the government land grab as steps toward total federal land use planning and control. Carried to its ultimate conclusion, the result would be national socialism, or close to it.