

Agriculture by Robert L. Baker

Wildlife groups gobble up farmland

The government is backing the environmentalists with big bucks, while food production is being destroyed.

Ln January 1991, the Reynolds Aluminum plant at Troutdale, Oregon sold a wetland property with no development value to the Trust for Public Lands for \$2.7 million. TPL immediately resold the property to the U.S. Forest Service for \$2.8 million, making a profit of \$100,000. Doing about \$55 million in business per year with the U.S. government, the Trust for Public Lands has become non-taxable big business.

"A new land trust is created every five days," according to the Land Trust Alliance, and over one-third of the 899 U.S. land trusts have been created in the last five years. Fast-growing and well-funded, they are purchasing millions of acres of land with behind-the-door nods from government agencies, hinting at later repurchase by the federal government itself.

This land is being taken out of useful agricultural production as the independent American family farmer is driven into bankruptcy. While the wealthy acquire their nature preserves, the world's food supply and productive agriculture dwindles.

A typical case is reported in the December 1991 issue of *Farm Journal* magazine. Bill House, an Oklahoma rancher, lost leases to 7,500 acres of pastureland in 1989, when the Nature Conservancy, the largest of the land preservation groups, bought the 30,000-acre ranch from which he leased his land.

The Nature Conservancy, one of the oldest and largest U.S. land trusts, buys land at the rate of 1,000 acres per day. Operating budgets of \$223 million, in 1990, helped bring about

the purchase of the 500-square-mile Gray Ranch in New Mexico and the 30,000-acre Barnard Ranch in Oklahoma.

A little over 50 years ago, Congress passed laws to give land away. Today, the federal government, which still owns 33% of the nation's land base, or about 725 million acres, has billion-dollar taxpayer superfunds such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (about \$7 billion) or the North American Wetland Conservation Fund (\$30 million) to use to repurchase land.

Former Interior Secretary James Watt doesn't think much of this situation. "We can't afford to take care of what we have," he says. "But the bureaucracies under Congress are using the Nature Conservancy as a holding group until they get the money. Land purchases by conservation groups would slow down considerably if they couldn't resell to the government."

Many foundation-funded non-profit organizations are being used as fronts through which money can be funneled to create and mold hundreds of supposedly grassroots groups in each state, which collectively become a political mechanism through which land control can be policed.

Take a look at one network that influences grassroots groups in the United States from the international level. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the largest environmental group on the international stage, is controlled top-down by Britain's Prince Philip.

The U.S. branch of the World Wildlife Fund has functioned in tan-

dem since the 1980s with the Conservation Foundation, and both are backed by Rockefeller money.

The Conservation Foundation created several subsidiary front groups, one of which is the American Farmland Trust (AFT), a non-profit front also backed by Rockefeller money, and with Mrs. David Rockefeller on its board.

The AFT is trying to establish a string of non-profit Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) organizations all over the United States, whose sole purpose is to buy farmland, place non-agricultural restrictions on the deed, sell off the development rights to a government agency, then resell the farmland with restricted uses.

These organizations are like a revolving door, with the directors and other top personnel moving from one organization to the other, yet with the policy always controlled by the wealthy Anglo-American elites.

The current chairman of the Conservation Foundation, for example, Russell Train, is the former chairman of the federal government's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and one of the top environmentalist enforcers in the establishment.

Train's predecessor at the Conservation Foundation, William Reilly, is now the chairman of the EPA; before that, he was chairman of the American Farmland Trust.

The current chairman of the American Farmland Trust, Patrick F. Noonan, is also president of the Conservation Fund; he was the president of the Nature Conservancy.

Cloaked in the rhetoric of "land preservation" and environmentalism, wealthy establishment families and financial elites are also providing the donations and hands-on control to build a large network of land trusts, as non-profit front groups to restrict the developmental use of land.