

Angry patriots

Inland Northwest emerges as home to a growing anti-government movement

By Jim Lynch · Staff writer

Additional reporting by staff writers Julie Sullivan, Bill Morlin and Craig Welch

The Inland Northwest's hostility toward Uncle Sam is as real as the growl in a Doberman's throat.

Counties threaten to seize control of public lands. Armed posses vow to fight federal abuses of power.

A livid Colville plumber has gone so far as to pray for the president's death – on the radio.

Frustration. Distrust. Fear. Fury.

A fierce anti-government movement is uniting growing factions of people who share a common, perceived enemy – an intrusive, corrupt and deaf Big Brother.

From the surly taxpayer to the weapons-hungry militiaman, this uprising is as gentle as a bumper sticker and as menacing as a fertilizer bomb.

Look around.

In Eastern Washington, the number of home-schooled children has doubled in the past four years as parents reject government-driven



Dan McComb/The Spokesman-Review

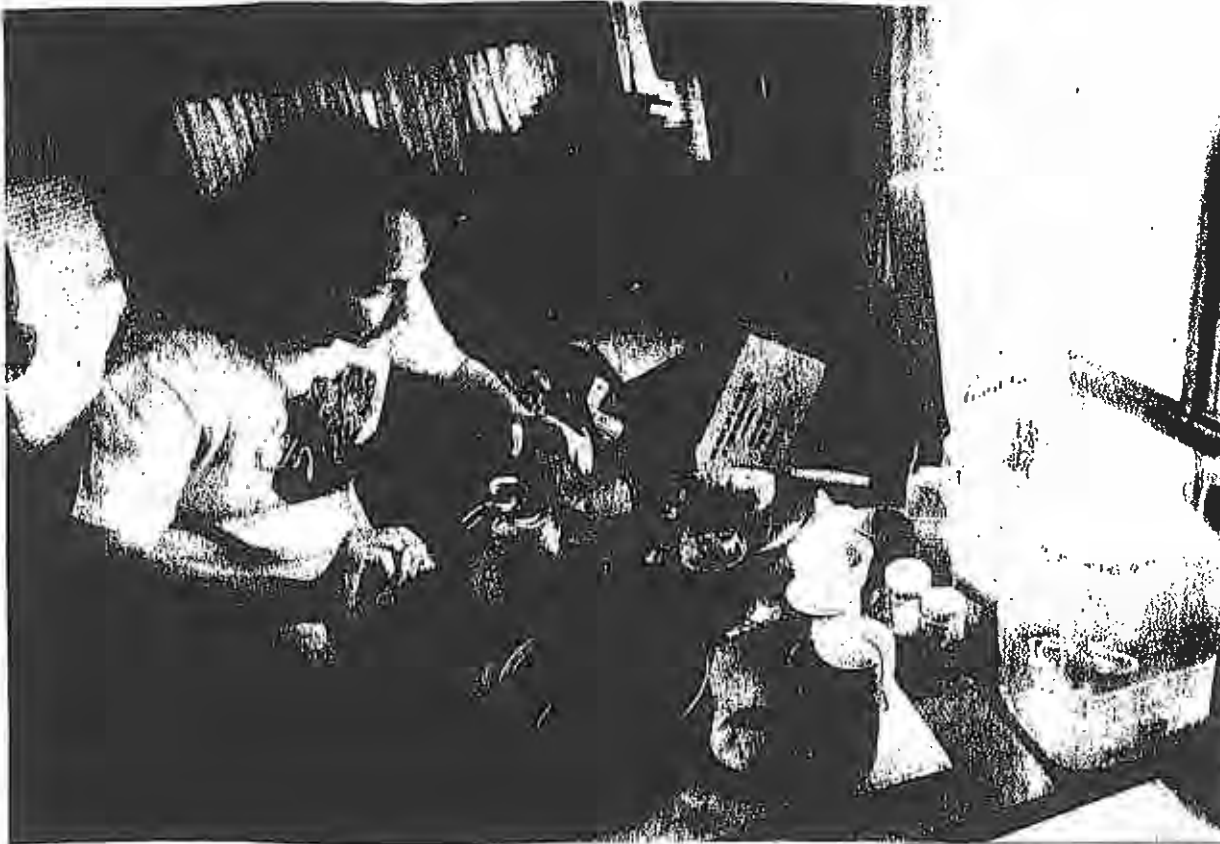
“The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”

Thomas Jefferson



The region's anti-government movement is diverse, ranging from this secret armed militia (above) to a Sandpoint citizens group called Taxpayers United for Freedom (below) that meets regularly to talk about government.

Don McDonald/The Spokesman-Review



Kristy MacDonald/The Spokesman-Review

Diana Heun

Kamiah, Idaho

Heun and her husband, Greg, moved to the patriot subdivision Almost Heaven to get away from crime and corruption. "Here we all know who we all are."



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curriculums.

In the Columbia Basin, the IRS watches a spreading tax revolt that includes a Grant County deputy assessor who openly refuses to pay her federal income tax.

In Western Montana, Noxon rebels turn their militia into a mail-order cottage industry, and county planners get death threats for trying to tell people what to do with their land.

Many in this broad movement call themselves "new patriots." Their numbers are impossible to pinpoint. But they're clearly shaping rural politics and penetrating the cities, too.

For more than a year, one group calling itself Concerned Citizens of Washington has met weekly in the basement of a county-owned building in the Spokane Valley. Members watch militia videos and talk about government abuses.

The region's tenor has shifted as dramatically as it has inside Congress, which in the past year went from the courtly leadership of Tom Foley to the sledgehammer guidance of Newt Gingrich.

Government-bashing is not just acceptable, it's fashionable. A bipartisan national poll in July showed 76 percent of Americans don't trust the country's leaders anymore, an all-time high.

Distrust of the U.S. government has always run deep here, where about half the bounty of natural resources and northern Rockies scenery belongs to the feds.

Now our region is a national rage center: the land of Randy Weaver, the home of constitutionalists, of Libertarians, John Birchers, Earth Firsters and Aryans, too.

The Inland Northwest even cradled the nation's militia movement, which federal investigators suspect helped inspire the worst blast of homegrown terrorism in the country's history - the April 19 Oklahoma

City bombing that killed 168 people.

Raw government hatred is so common it's found in shopper tabloids in Coeur d'Alene minimarts. The June 29 issue of Reward! ran former Ku Klux Klan leader Louis Beam's revolutionary manifesto about "leaderless resistance" next to an advertisement for massage therapy.

Some professors, human rights leaders and police warn the movement's militant wing goes beyond constructive dissent, flirts with terrorism and threatens the republic.

Carl Raschke studied domestic threats and cults for his 1990 book "Painted Black," and continues to monitor subversive groups. He says the nation's anti-government refrain is loudest in rural Western states. "Wherever there are pine trees and mountains, you're going to find it."

But the University of Denver professor suspects the Inland Northwest is the most ferocious region because of its explosive cocktail of passionate rebel leaders, including neo-Nazis and other militants.

This region "is to the anti-government movement what Syria is to the Islamic terrorist movement," Raschke says.

Gary Morton looks around and sees the seeds of a regional rebellion that could tie up federal troops for months.

The head of Spokane's Libertarian Party says the uprising reflects people's sense that the federal government wants to control them, not listen to them.

"Many people out here feel no more connection with this government than Americans felt for King George in 1776," Morton says. "These folk look at the folk back there in Washington, D.C., as an occupational army."

Mainstream anger

No longer exiled to the fringe, the anti-government message resounds throughout an inland, tri-state area where independent Ross Perot fared almost as well as Bill Clinton in 1992.

This brew of disgruntled Americans includes populists, Christian fundamentalists, gun owners, home-schoolers, loggers, small-government advocates and others who share a growing sense of national rot.

The frustrations and fears are diverse: A trampled U.S. Constitution. Strangling regulations. A federal police state. Staggering national debt. A one-world economy. Deteriorating public schools.

Why is the anger so rampant? People increasingly believe the government wants to micro-manage lives and livelihoods it doesn't understand.

Now linked by the Internet, faxes, telephone trees and mailing lists, activists are banding together and fighting back.

Gun-rights champions combat new restrictions with their own agendas. Benewah County, Idaho, considered requiring a gun in every home this year. Riverside, in northcentral Washington, liked the idea and passed it.

Tax protesters are getting bolder, too. Seminars tell people how to "legally" avoid paying income and property taxes. Some people demand refunds on past taxes paid.

Even the education front is increasingly anti-government. During the past two years, 800 families from Colville to

Missoula formed a group to protest "outcome-based education," a federally approved curriculum they fear lowers test scores and weakens instruction.

Some parents see the program as a big-government, big-business ploy to mold robots for the 21st century workplace. "Why?" asks Joanne McCann, a retired Spokane elementary school principal. "Why don't they want our kids to be independent thinkers?"

Elements of the anti-government movement appeal to something inside most of us.

A national poll in May found that 55 percent of Americans believe the government has grown so big it threatens freedoms.

The numbers run higher in the rural West, which is no longer as wild as many residents would like.

The past 40 years have brought increased government control and regulation, creating an expanding rule book people must follow.

Consider:

In 1950, the Federal Register had 12,000 pages of regulations. Today it has 90,000.

Washington state's 130 agencies, boards and commissions crafted 880 new regulations last year. The U.S. government spat out another 4,886.

These new rules are rarely succinct.

The U.S. Constitution was written in 4,543 words. A new regulation controlling the sale of cabbage runs 27,000 words.

"A true bureaucracy, that's what we're living under today," says Len McIrvin, a third-generation Eastern Washington rancher. "Unelected people are dictating how we live, and that's wrong."

Bureaucrats are irritated, too.

Steve Belzak points out that the city of

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Doug Grumbach

Ferry County, Wash.

The fourth-generation rancher is trying to keep the family cattle operation going. His father, Kenneth, feels so strangled by environmental regulations he is considering subdividing the ranch.





Colin Molvany/The Spokesman-Review

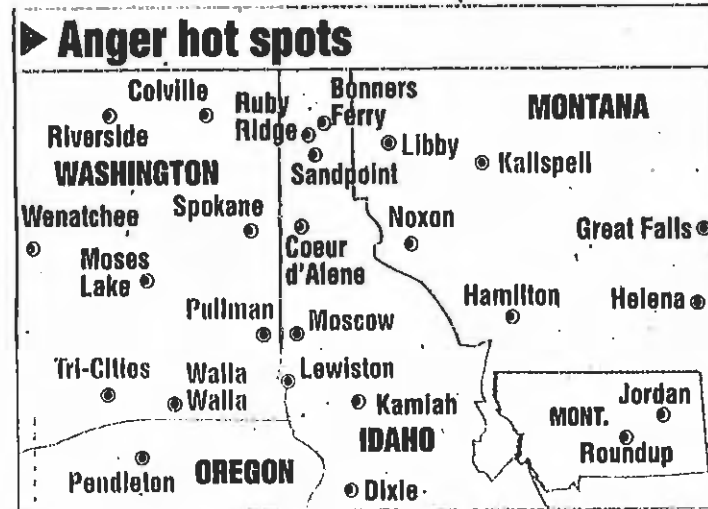
Angry patriots

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Spokane's building regulations were an inch thick in 1958, a half-foot tall in 1976 and now stand over 3 feet high.

"We used to help people do things," says Belzak, an official at the Spokane city Building Department. "We used to be providers. Now, we're just regulators."

The old codes ensured safety, he says, by protecting against furnace fires and other hazards. Now energy codes also



dictate the size of windows and the thickness of walls.

"We're getting into social engineering here. We've taken choices away from individuals and given them to bureaucracies."

Stanley Sloan is taking on bureaucrats with a bulldozer.

The Post Falls developer is bent on foiling plans for a new federal alcohol and drug center near property he owns in the Spokane Valley. When the feds asked to run a water line across 30 feet of it last

summer, Sloan vowed to use his bulldozer against anyone who crossed his land.

The entire episode smacks of bureaucratic arrogance, he says, noting the project was built before the government secured water. "It blows my mind that they spent in excess of \$4 million and they don't have water. That's your out-of-control government right there."

The bureaucracy recoils

From the government's perch, the Inland Northwest has been heating up since August 1992, when a hundred people rallied at a North Idaho roadblock to torment federal agents trying to apprehend scofflaw Randy Weaver.

President George Bush's bodyguards were so worried about the region's rage during that time, they helped persuade him to delay his campaign trip to Colville.

Bush's spokesmen described it as a scheduling glitch. But a knowledgeable

sheriff's deputy says the Secret Service wanted to let the area cool down after the shootout that killed Weaver's son, his wife and a deputy U.S. marshal.

Now it's the Clinton White House that makes veins pop out on foreheads in this chunk of the country.

About 1,000 people crammed into Coeur d'Alene's Lake City High School gymnasium in November last year to listen to Larry Nichols' insights into Bill Clinton's character.

The former Arkansas state worker

Afri-I

Stevens County, Wash.

He moved to a hillside in the forest to escape society and its rules. Afri-I, a massour, ripped up his Social Security card and driver's license, and doesn't believe in income taxes or gun control.

insisted the president was part of the "Dixie Mafia - the biggest crime syndicate in the history of this nation." He claimed to possess 5,400 pages of documents proving Clinton's hit men killed 40 people to silence them about his illicit acts.

The crowd roared, giving Nichols repeated standing ovations.

Clinton's Secret Service keeps an eye on the region's radicals, including Mark Reynolds, who suggested a prayer for Clinton on his Feb. 26 radio broadcast on KCVL-AM, Colville's lone radio station.

"Let his days be few, and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow," said Reynolds, who is no longer on the air. "We need to maybe pray that for this wonderful president we have."

The widespread antagonism has government officials tiptoeing around here like people trying not to upset hot-headed relatives.

The government has yet to challenge new ordinances by five Inland Northwest counties that demand control of federal lands within their borders.

Instead, federal foresters are told not to wear their uniforms in volatile zones, and urged not to argue with armed citizens.

A March 22 Forest Service directive advised foresters about potential clashes with local control advocates.

"If you are confronted, detained, or placed in custody by state or local authorities, while engaged in or on account of your duties, cooperate, do not resist."

Jim Baca, former director of the U.S. Bureau of Lands Management, says his Western offices received bomb threats almost daily in 1993.

When someone actually hurled a bomb onto the roof of his Reno headquarters in October 1993, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt chose to do nothing about it, Baca complains.

"They blew off half the building. And then Babbitt and everyone wanted to keep a lid on it. He didn't want to rock the boat."

Government troops are getting cautious, too.

During a massive training exercise last April, Fairchild Air Force Base received calls from people threatening to fire at helicopters flying too close to their homes.

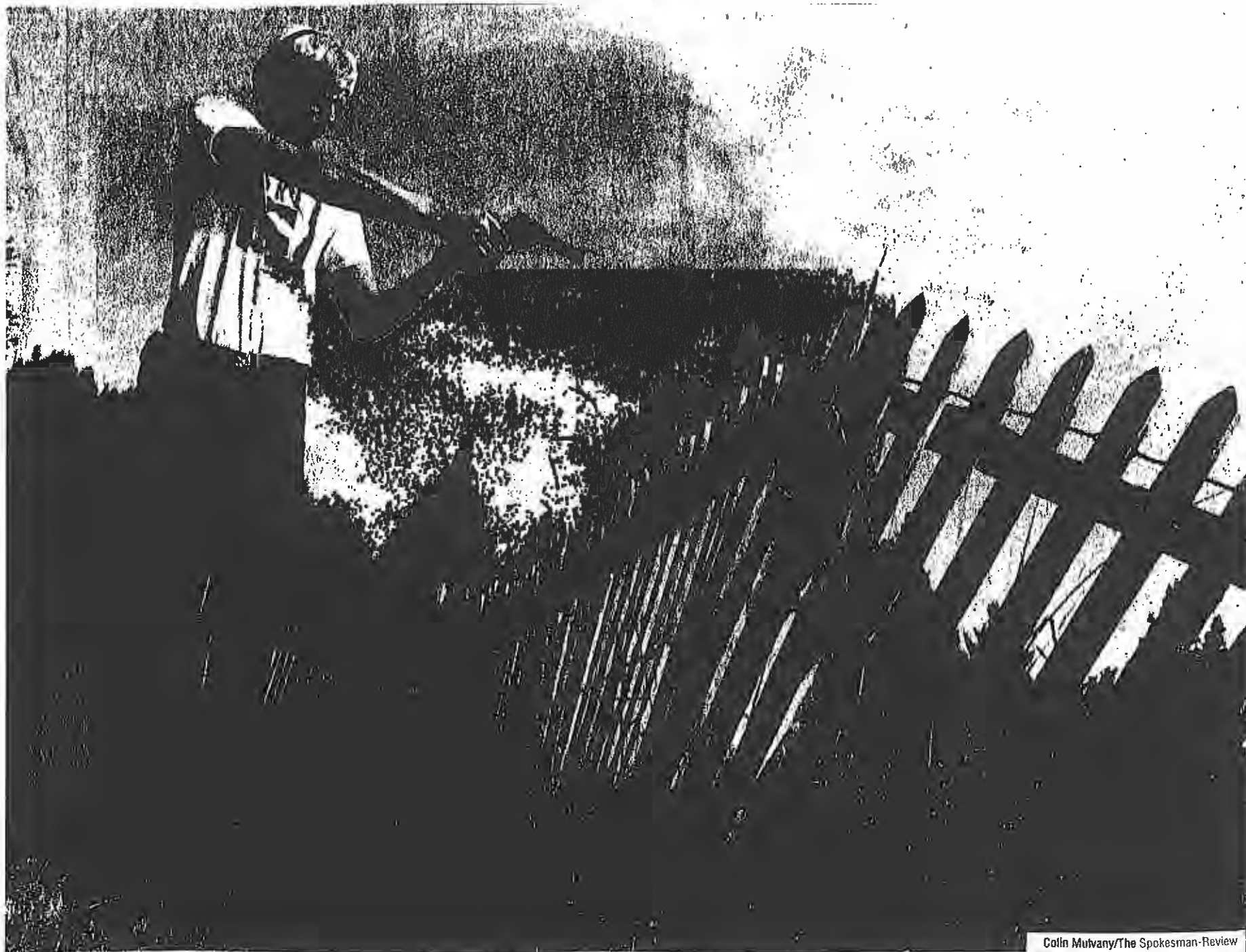
Instead of dismissing the callers, "Woodland Cougar" planners slapped a 3-mile-wide no-fly zone around a particularly angry rancher outside Springdale, Wash., and told helicopter pilots to look out for real gunfire.

In May, the Idaho Army National Guard asked the media to please inform Kootenai County residents that the tanks rolling along state Highway 53 were not part of a United Nations invasion.

Also this year, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) didn't pursue allegations that a Spokane Valley resident with militia ties was making his own firearms.

Divorce papers filed in March accuse the man of owning two driver's licenses with different names and addresses. His estranged wife claims he hoarded ammunition and designed and built

Continued. **Angry patriots/H4**



Tim Hoecher

Colville, Wash.

The young farmer is a budding political activist who believes many laws are unconstitutional and federal government has overstepped its bounds in Steven County.

PHOTO

Angry patriots: Weaver and Waco just won't go away

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weapons, including, possibly, pen guns.

Bob Harper, the ATF's top agent in Spokane, says there wasn't enough evidence to trigger an investigation. He says the case probably wouldn't have been pursued even before the agency got in the public's cross hairs.

But Harper admits the uproar is chilling. "I think we're probably more sensitive about the types of cases we work, and the people we investigate."

Instead of confronting antagonists, Congress appears bent on placating them with televised investigations into two lightning-rod events — the 1993 siege of the Branch Davidian compound outside Waco, Texas, and the Weaver debacle.

Idaho Sen. Larry Craig says the Weaver hearings should help calm angry Americans by showing that the system works, that Congress will hold agencies accountable.

"I believe the hearings have been helpful in the sense of the average citizen out there saying, 'You know, Congress did hear us.'"

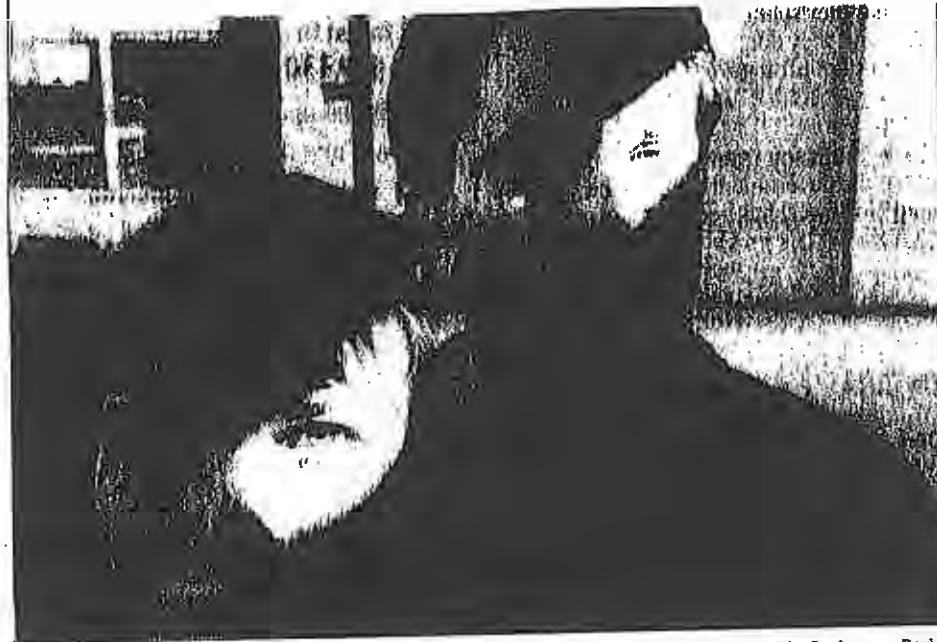
The hearings didn't satisfy everyone.

In October, suspected anti-government terrorists bombed a New York weather station and derailed an Amtrak train in Arizona.

In each case, they left notes professing their disgust with the government's handling of Waco, Weaver or both.

Changing the face of politics

The public's wrath not only scares bureaucrats and startles Congress, it's also changing politics at the local level.



Dan McComb/The Spokesman-Review

Kathy and Wade Polglase

Moses Lake, Wash.

"Income tax laws are not applicable to us," says Wade Polglase, an auto glass business owner who says he doesn't pay his taxes. "Show me the law, statute or provision that says I am liable."

Increasingly, candidates see anti-government groups as voter blocks that cannot be ignored. Some candidates court their support.

In Idaho, Secretary of State Pete Cenarrusa, Lt. Gov. Butch Otter and Superintendent of Schools Anne Fox all spoke at leadership meetings for the U.S. Militia Association, based in Blackfoot.

The Idaho-based Northwest Liberty Network, a constitutionalist group formed last year, draws hundreds of people to some of its events. It lobbies legislators and holds candidate forums.

While many politicians are listening to the rebel groups, no incumbent works the circuit better than Idaho's U.S. Rep. Helen Chenoweth, the region's new congressional celebrity.

The Militia of Montana is so enamored with her it sells videotapes of her speeches. Firearms fans and people incensed by environmental regulations consider her their champion, too.

When she arrived at the American Legion Hall in Bonners Ferry in October, the 100 people in the sleepy crowd sprang off their seats to applaud.

A gentle-voiced maverick with meticulous magazine looks, Chenoweth mocked the government's efforts to protect endangered animals, and charmed her audience with comments like: "I really think it's true that once you hug a logger you never go back to trees."

She peppered her speech with cracks about ballooning bureaucracies and "rattlesnake" politicians. She swung at appointed federal judges, noting, to applause, that she plans to push a bill that limits how long they can serve. "They're not accountable to anyone," she explained.

The bold talk also surfaces in the statehouses, where proposals that probably would have been slapped aside a few years ago were routinely considered in 1995.

■ The Idaho Legislature created a \$1 million defense fund to protect the state against any federal incursion of its rights.

■ Eastern Washington lawmakers tried to persuade their colleagues to let people pack guns on their hips, and to formally ask the U.S. government to minimize its involvement in the United Nations.

■ Montana lawmakers considered forcing homosexuals to register with the state and requiring federal investigators to notify sheriffs before arresting county residents.

Montana state Sen. Steve Doherty says debate slid into an "atmosphere of hate" this year. Senators pander to vigilante bullies who want to destroy the establishment, not fix it, says the Great Falls lawmaker.

"The end result of this hatred of authority... can lead to increased paranoia and can legitimize some people who ought to be wearing aluminum foil in their ball caps so that the Martian ray beams don't mess with their heads."

In November, Washington voters rejected an initiative that would have forced governments to compensate people for financial losses inflicted by land-use regulations. But the proposal won strong support in rural Eastern Washington counties.

State House Majority Leader Dale Foreman, cast the "Takings Initiative" in the new patriots' vernacular.

"It's about time the government begins to obey the Constitution again," says the 1996 candidate for governor.

Modern-day pamphleteers

Much as Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" inspired Americans to break from British rule, the 208-year-old U.S.

Continued: **Angry patriots/H5**



Dan McComb/The Spokesman-Review

Steve Aver

Sandpoint, Idaho

He believes driving is a right, not a privilege, and spent 45 days in the Bonner County Jail this fall for driving without a license. "If I don't stand up for liberty, I'm a slave."



Phil Davis

Bonnets Ferry, Idaho

"I feel I'm the richest man in the world," says Davis, who started logging at the age of 6, stripping bark from trees his father cut down. But his love of the woods is tempered by the anger that his sons can't enjoy the same way of life.

Angry patriots

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Constitution is held up by many as the reason to revolt today.

People throughout the region pull "Citizen Handbooks" from breast pockets to damn the establishment and prove the federal government has strayed from its road map.

The slim pamphlet holds the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and warnings from founding fathers, such as this one from George Washington:

"Government is not reason; it is not eloquence; it is force! Like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master."

A prevailing distrust of government has always been part of the nation's personality. And historians agree that public debate and scrutiny deter the abuses and excesses of power — if critics work within the political system.

Many strident constitutionalists now refuse to recognize existing governments, courts or U.S. currency.

Near Jordan, Mont., self-styled freemen created "Justus Township" and picked their own judge. In October, they seized \$66,700 worth of ABC News camera gear at gunpoint.

Citing constitutional rights and archaic common law, angry patriots also baffle the courts, county treasurers and the IRS with defiant documents.

The Washington secretary of state reports a surge of petitions from people asking to relinquish their U.S. citizenship in exchange for becoming sovereign residents of the Republic of Washington.

From 1986 through 1992 there were 13 such filings. Since then, there have been 209.

Even more often, constitutionalists file bogus liens against judges, state troopers, bankers and lawyers, sometimes succeeding in temporarily tainting credit records.

Washington state felt so overwhelmed by the unusual documents it assigned Assistant Attorney General Jeff Even to study the legal logic behind them.

"My first reaction was that these people must be a bunch of morons," Even says. "But when you take a look at it, that's not at all true. It's actually a very careful and meticulous theory."

Still, Even doubts any judge would deem the documents valid.

Both Montana and Washington passed laws this year to better protect public officials from harassment and to free clerks from the obligation of filing most constitutionalist documents.

But they keep coming.

In August 1994, a man named J.D. Anderson filed an unusual notice with the Stevens County Superior Court. His papers warned county officials that if they processed an IRS lien against his property, they would be held personally responsible for "all expense, loss or otherwise mental or physical damage I might suffer."

Three months later, Stevens County voters picked Anderson for one of their three commissioners.

Anderson refuses to publicly discuss his views with what he calls the "socialist, liberal media."

But he had this to say in a brief conversation with a reporter last summer: "People better start listening to something besides what's coming out of Washington," D.C.

He noted the Waco and Weaver hearings indicate even Congress realizes Uncle Sam is out of control.

"Could it be," Anderson asked, "that the nuts are right?"



Dan McComb/The Spokesman-Review

Gary DeMott predicts an economic crash will help the middle class see that government has strayed from the Constitution.

Profile: Gary DeMott

'We are the law'

One-man road show challenges legitimacy of federal authority

By Jim Lynch
Staff writer

Gary DeMott's heavy head hangs over a desk cluttered with nine obscure law books that help him educate people that the U.S. government is a sham.

Only gold or silver is real U.S. currency. The United States is a republic not a democracy. A federal income tax is illegal. Most U.S. courts are not legitimate.

"We are the law," he tells his audiences. "We are the law enforcers."

The chain-smoking Boise constitutionalist is the Idaho Sovereignty Association, a one-man road show he's taken to about 30 Idaho towns this year.

At each stop, DeMott tells people the federal government has no right to tell Idaho how to manage its public lands. He also tells them how to set up constitutional courts at the county level and how to avoid federal income taxes, which he boasts he hasn't paid in 30 years.

"I tell people to remember to act like an American and not like some subject," he says.

DeMott tosses out his unconventional contentions and enjoys watching people try to swallow them.

"There are no federal public lands in the West." He likes that one. He smiles.

"The Federal Reserve is run by private corporations." The cigarette ash grows long as he sucks harder. "Did you know that?"

"The judiciary system: A closed union shop is what that is."

Life is all about timing, and his time has arrived, he explains, snuffing another Alpine Light 100 in an

ash tray that says "Smoker's Rights."

"Everybody who is an activist is someone whose ox got gored," he adds. "Until you've got it gored, you think everything is fine."

DeMott, 57, didn't need a run-in with the government to realize everything wasn't cool.

His views sprouted from a lifelong study of "the system" that began in the U.S. Air Force and continued with his ongoing fascination and scholarly study of the Constitution and the courts.

"When Perot got up to 38-40 percent (in the polls) that's when I knew there was enough dissatisfaction out there and I got into the fray."

He likens Ross Perot to Paul Revere, and says Perot helped open minds to DeMott's message that the Constitution has been cast aside.

"We're the 900-pound gorilla that's just arriving on the scene," he says of the constitutionalist movement.

As evidence, he points to his role in sponsoring Idaho's 10th Amendment Resolution. The Legislature passed it this year to assert that all rights not granted to the federal government in the Constitution belong to the state.

Does DeMott advocate bloody revolution?

No.

"We've got to have an orderly transition, a nice revolution . . . a restoration."

At the end of an interview, DeMott exits with one last bold contention:

"If you quote me out of context or misquote me in any way, I'll own your newspaper." He smiles.

"We're getting pretty good at these corporate liens."

the ragged edge

**This land
is mine**



Longtime rancher Kenneth Grumbach fears son Doug won't be able to continue the tradition.

Almost Heaven

Patriots buy into Bo Gritz's dream of freedom, but at what price?

By Jim Lynch
Staff writer

Perched far above the Clearwater River is a 200-acre sprawl of windy grasslands with a post-card, top-of-the-world view of Idaho.

People from across the country settle here on ponderosa-spiked lots, crafting homes out of earth, logs and even car tires in this land of no building codes or inspectors.

They come in hopes of recreating the country, of living the way their ancestors did back before — they believe — the U.S. government began betraying its people.

The 5- and 10-acre lots are sold in a confusing web of trusts. No conventional banks are involved. To live here, you must sign a pledge to uphold the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

For a growing pack of disgruntled Americans and Christian patriots this place is Almost Heaven.

That's the name former Green Beret and populist presidential candidate James "Bo" Gritz stamped on his hilltop subdivision.

He advertises the real estate and its patriot vision on his radio show and his "Center for Action" newsletter out of Nevada.

Contrary to public suspicion, Almost Heaven doesn't resemble a militant compound.

It looks more like "Little House on the Prairie," slowly filling with families trying to build homes before winter hits.

About 10 families have moved in. Another dozen are



Bob Ines works in bitter wind, with a case of the flu, trying to finish his waterline before the ground freezes. His son, Joshua, 8, keeps him company.

expected within the next couple years.

To get to Almost Heaven, you wind up an endless mountain road from Kamiah. There is no gate to mark the entrance, only an easy-to-miss string of mailboxes.

The only signs are warnings: "Do not enter private roads without permission. Please stay on public roads."

The streets are gravel paths, which will some day,

according to the master plan, bear the names of our founding fathers: Washington Way, Madison Lane, Franklin Drive and Adams Court.

Ross Spirling was just finishing the outside of his two-story home as the first snowfall landed in November.

"It's nice to be up here with a bunch of people who don't think we're nuts," says Spirling, a strapping man with large calloused hands and a Texas twang.

"My whole family thinks we're nuts. They think everything's just hunky-dory. Once you learn enough about the U.S. government you can't go back. You can't accept the 'everything's-fine' story."

Spirling's disgust with the government stems from environmental controls he believes strangled his livelihood as a Texas shrimper. He also grew weary of paying a hurricane insurance bill.

He laughs at the notion that Almost Heaven residents are preparing for a defiant showdown with government agents.

"We came up here to get out of their face," he says.

The biggest house in Almost Heaven belongs to Jerry Gillespie, Bo Gritz's business partner and a former Arizona state senator. His driveway bears this warning: "No Trespassing. Private Property. This Means You!"

Gillespie, who runs the Idaho land deals for Gritz, says he has sold about 75 lots, many over the telephone, for three hilltop developments. He says he never asks about anyone's

Continued: **Almost Heaven/A7**

the ragged edge



Joseph Imes, 11, plays king of the mountain under a majestic Almost Heaven sky, near Kamlah, Idaho.



Kenneth Grumbach's grandfather started the family ranch. Now Grumbach says land-use regulations threaten to end it. "The land is more than just something to look at," his son Doug says. "We're attached to it."

Dan McComb/The Spokesman-Review

Fenced by regulations, private property activists begin to battle back

By Jim Lynch
Staff writer

For people fighting to keep regulators off private and public lands, new battle-fronts emerge every year.

At issue:
Land

Thirty years ago there was no U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or state Department of Ecology inspecting lands, rivers and businesses.

Ten years back, endangered salmon and owls weren't holding up timber sales. Six years ago, there were no stringent wetlands rules, no threat of Snake River drawdowns, no Growth Management Act.

Just three years ago, there wasn't a White House crusade to boost grazing fees or a move afoot to fatten the rule book governing the Spokane River shoreline.

Emboldened activists now are responding with campaigns to peel back regulations and wrestle control of the land from politicians and bureaucrats.

Five Eastern Washington and North Idaho counties have adopted resolutions that attempt to seize local control of all land within their borders.

More are expected to try.

The uprising spreads with growing evidence of regulations that seemingly defy common sense.

■ Margo Thompson, a Christian school teacher near Chesaw, Wash., can't turn 11 of her 12 acres into a public campground because yellow lady slippers grow there. The threatened plants happened to be in full bloom when a state regulator visited in June 1994.

■ Bill Brown, a Sandpoint, Idaho, developer, spent \$5,000 and two months last year to convince federal wildlife officials to let him build a housing development near Lake Pend Oreille within a mile of a bald eagle's nest.

■ The U.S. Park Service cited Charles Kringen in 1989 for maintaining a trail below his Lake Roosevelt home. Kringen was busted after a park officer discovered the retired man used a weed-whacker on the federal end of the path to the lake.

■ The U.S. Forest Service recently took almost two years to approve a request by a private Idaho County landowner to haul his own timber along a half-mile stretch of a federal logging road in North Idaho.

Adding to the lands conflict is a White House that strikes many as insensitive and ignorant.

First, Vice President Al Gore writes a brainy environmental book about saving the planet; then, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt announces he wants to be the first Cabinet member to blow up a Western dam.

"He'd be better off to keep his mouth shut," says Cecil Andrus, two-time Idaho governor and former U.S. Interior secretary under President Carter.

Andrus says the Clinton administration botched potential solutions to Western land-use crises such as grazing fees and mining rights.

"The politicians brought (this uprising) on themselves by being less sensitive and more dictatorial in blatant disregard of the wishes of the people," Andrus says.

Washington state politicians helped galvanize land rights groups with the 1990 Growth Management Act. The law funnels construction into the cities, angering people who had counted on developing rural land.

Richard Epstein, a University of Chicago law professor, calls Washington's land policies "Leninist."

"I've been to Washington state, and you have a serious problem out there," says Epstein, author of a book on government regulations.

Chuck Gardner still grouches about his collision with Spokane bureaucrats. The retired antique dealer bought 250 feet of riverfront in Peaceful Valley and set out to build his dream home.

When he went to get the building permit, he received a list of unexpected requirements. After two years of challenging them — and spending \$7,300 on an attorney — he surrendered in 1991.

To build his Clarke Avenue home, Gardner had to give the city a 6-foot easement for a potential waterfront trail, and sell a 50-foot lot — at what he considered a \$4,000 loss — to the city parks department.

"It's blackmail," he says.

The city of Spokane is now considering new, more detailed, shoreline restrictions. The old rule book

had 18 pages of regulations. Its proposed replacement has 71 pages.

Regulations trigger activism. Consider the Ferry County Action League.

The group was born during a battle for control of the Kettle River, a healthy vein of mountain water snaking through northeastern Washington.

When the U.S. government tried to label it a "wild and scenic river" in 1991, horror stories spread:

The feds will decide what can be built on the banks! They'll tell us what colors we can paint our homes! We'll lose control of the river!

About 50 residents gathered to plot a counterattack. They bombarded the U.S. Senate with telephone calls until the proposal was dropped.

The next county battle was even more of a rallying cry.

In early 1993, the state Legislature considered new mining rules that could have shut down Ferry County's biggest mine.

The action league sent the state Capitol a 54-foot fax of letters opposing the plan, and beat it.

The group has since muscled its way onto most every county board and agency.

"Some people would view that as a threat," admits Stan Schneider, one of the action group founders. "I see it as democracy in action."

The land revolt feeds on suspicions that the government wants to phase out natural resources jobs.

"I think there's a ploy to put us out of business, to get rid of us because we're too independent," says Kenneth Grumbach, a third-generation Eastern Washington rancher.

Years back, nobody ever looked in on his ranch, he says. Now relentless oversight from regulators and environmentalists takes a toll, he says.

Grumbach wants his 3,500-acre ranch to stay in the family forever, but lately finds himself thinking about subdividing it. He isn't sure he wants to stick his son with the headaches of ranching.

George Enneking tried to explain the region's land crises to an assembly of fellow county officials from across the country.

The affable Idaho County commissioner put it this way. "The problem is that Big Brother government is telling us we can't make a living anymore at what it is we do for a living."

Almost Heaven

Continued from A6

race or religion, although many are Mormons.

He says the attraction is this: "It's the freedom to come up here and do what you want."

Gillespie insists Almost Heaven won't host another Waco or Weaver debacle. "We won't let that happen."

But he admits there is a militant edge to some of the settlers. "I have people right here who are packing guns and getting ready for when the government comes," he says. "They've reached a boiling point."

Depending on who's talking, the man behind this remote enclave is either a reckless, self-promoting government-basher or one of America's role-model patriots.

Some human rights leaders fear Bo Gritz is a dangerous racist, the populist party's successor to former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke.

They point to his 1992 campaign quotes, such as "If ballots can't do it in '92, bullets may have to in '96."

Gritz also is trying to distance himself from his comment that the Oklahoma City bombing was a "Rembrandt."

People coming to live here know him as a decorated Vietnam War hero who fearlessly assails tyrannical leaders and brokered the settlement to the Randy Weaver standoff.

But most of them don't really know Gritz. Many haven't met him. He doesn't live here yet. He hasn't even started to build.

Gritz turned down repeated requests for an interview. His Nevada secretary explained that Gritz feels he has

been burned in the past by The Spokesman-Review and others in what he has collectively called "the faggot press."

Idaho County officials in Grangeville watch Gritz's real estate adventure with fascination, suspicion and fear.

A woman in the recorder's office says, "None of us want to be quoted in an article regarding Mr. Gritz. You can understand that."

Many lots are purchased by trusts – such as The Steelhead Trust and Red Rose Trust – not individuals.

An official in the county auditor's office describes the land deals this way: "It's the strangest thing we've ever seen."

County Commissioner George Enneking suspects Gritz is making good money off his land deals.

Idaho doesn't require buyers or sellers to record the price of land transactions, so it's hard to determine Gritz's profits.

But real estate agents say it is safe to assume Almost Heaven Properties Inc., and other Gritz-affiliated companies, are earning at least a 300 percent profit on the Idaho land investments, which total about 900 acres.

Greg Heun brought his family to Almost Heaven from Mesa, Ariz. Four months ago, his wife, Diana, gave birth to Gabriel, the first baby born in Almost Heaven, at Gillespie's home.

The Heuns say they were fleeing gang shootings and other random violence. Greg, formerly a Republican precinct leader, says he also wanted to get far away from

corrupt politics.

"Here we all know who we all are," Diana explains. "We think along the same values of honesty and integrity."

Greg Heun sees it as a return to simple living. "A place to pull together and do things the way our parents and grandparents did – and just help each other."

Heun and most other Almost Heaven residents are not employed yet, but they say they have received job offers and suspect there will be plenty of work as more people settle the hilltop.

While Almost Heaven is designed as an alternative paradise, it has some of the rules and conflicts of any growing subdivision.

There are limits on how long people can keep mobile homes on their property. The land has to be paid off in six months. There's also serious talk of forming a town council of 13 people, of creating another layer of government.

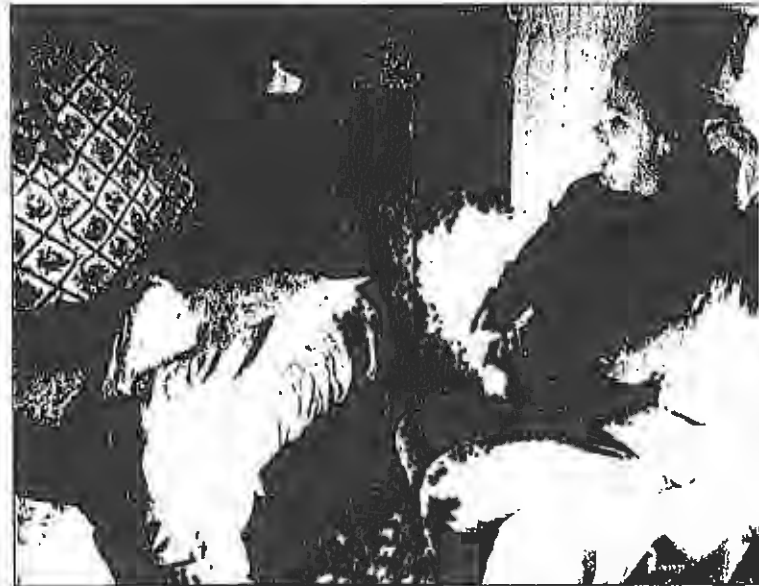
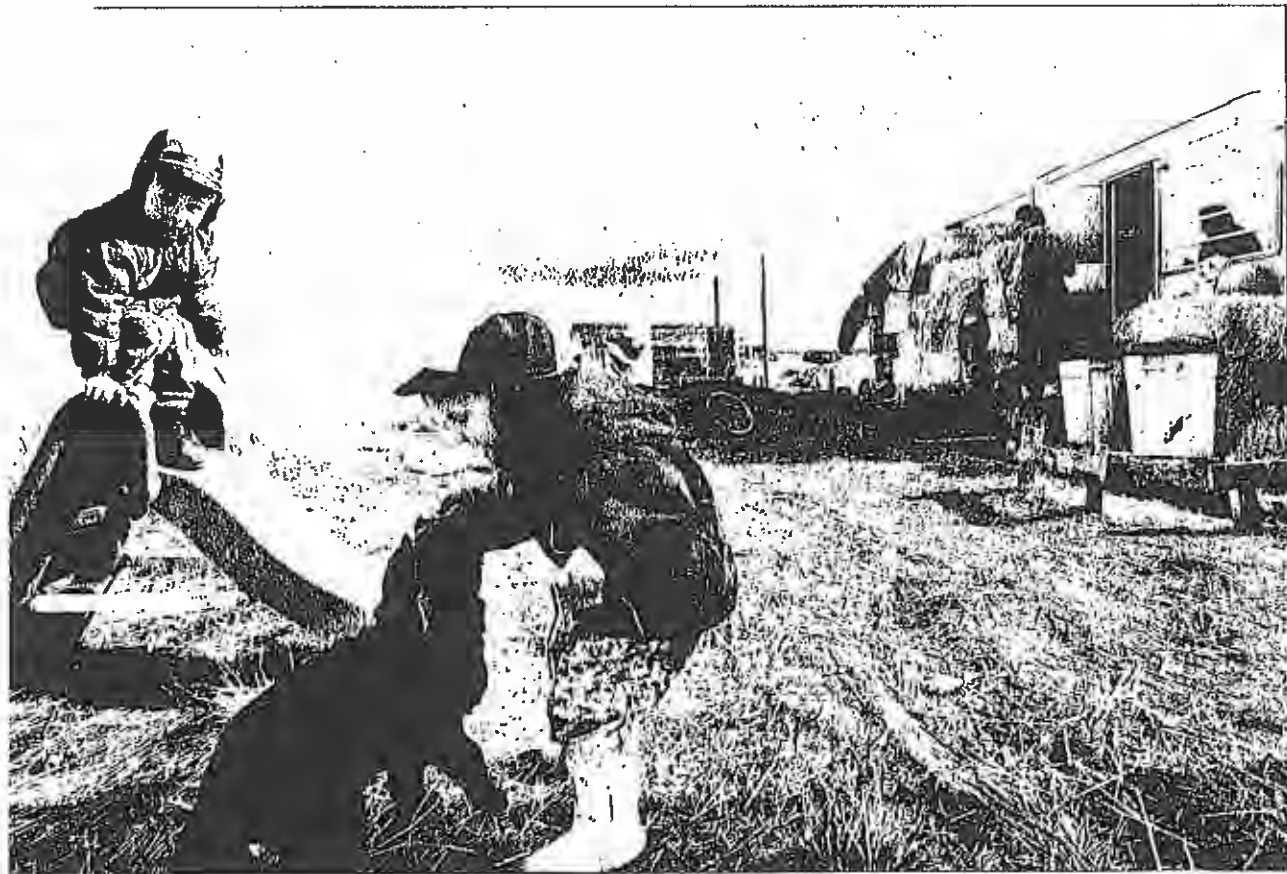
And few of the heavenly views are guaranteed to last, as people continue to build in front of each other.

"Bo's got the best spot," marvels Greg Heun, pointing at Gritz's hunk of cliffside land. "Nobody can build in front of him."

For many in Almost Heaven, it is simply hard living right now.

In mid-November, Julie Harper, her husband and their four children were staying in a camper that fits on the back of a pickup truck. They were waiting to finish their Earth Ship, a mostly underground home with car-tire walls and a big window facing south.

Standing in her muddy driveway littered with garbage freshly strewn by the family dog, Harper smiles and says, "I sometimes call it Almost Hell."



Above: Patty Imes and her daughter, Rebecca, share their halrbrushing ritual as morning sun streams through a small window.

Left: Rebecca Imes, 2, greets Rex the puppy, while her cousin, Cory Imes, 4, plays on the slide outside the Imes family trailer. Bales of straw surround the trailer for insulation.

Photography by Kristy MacDonald