

Subject Line: ICYMI - Beware of Out-of-Staters Peddling Anti-Conservation Panic in Lincoln

## Beware of Out-of-Staters Peddling Anti-Conservation Panic in Lincoln

With Friday's American Stewards of Liberty [anti-land conservation summit](#) in Lincoln, Nebraska fast approaching, the *Lincoln Journal Star* today [published an op-ed column by Accountable.US president Kyle Herrig](#) taking the group to task for its fringe extremism and lies about the Biden administration's land conservation efforts.

Herrig also questioned the participation of political leaders who would grant American Stewards legitimacy with their attendance, including **Governor Pete Ricketts (R-NE), U.S. Senator Kevin Cramer (R-ND), Rep. Lauren Boebert (R-CO), and former U.S. Interior Secretary David Bernhardt** among others.

### Guest column: Saving land, livelihoods

BY KYLE HERRIG

Growing up in Nebraska, my parents taught me the importance of telling the truth. I wish the same could be said for the out-of-staters descending on Lincoln Friday to "spoil environmentalists' Earth Day" – their words – with attacks on the America The Beautiful Initiative, which encourages voluntary efforts to protect American landscapes and waters for future generations.

Despite the fact that the modern conservation movement in the United States began in the 1800s, leaders from the Texas-based American Stewards of Liberty have bizarrely claimed such efforts have their roots not in American values but in Hitler's Germany.

The group's leaders have even claimed modern conservation efforts are akin to the Stalin-engineered Ukrainian genocide of the 1930s and promoted a conspiracy theory that land conservation is a United Nations ploy to subvert property rights. You can almost hear the black helicopters circling.

Teddy Roosevelt would be spinning in his grave to learn leaders like Gov. Pete Ricketts, former U.S. Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, Sen. Kevin Cramer of North Dakota and others are aligning themselves with a fringe group like American Stewards for its summit in Lincoln to attack conservation.

Ricketts is also sharing a stage with U.S. Rep. Lauren Boebert. Famous for her ramblings on Twitter and for interrupting President Biden's State of the Union address, the Colorado Republican shares American Stewards' penchant for embracing extremism. She was reportedly in prior contact with the organizers of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. Boebert has

also lovingly quoted Wayne Hage, an anti-government extremist whose daughter and son-in-law now run American Stewards. Hage helped birth anti-public lands movements like the Sagebrush Rebellion and the Bundy family standoff in southeastern Nevada.

American Stewards is lying to Nebraskans when it claims the America The Beautiful Initiative is “the largest federal land grab our nation has ever faced.” In truth, it is no “land grab” at all. The effort merely seeks to conserve U.S. lands and waters using existing laws and voluntary protections and easements, which are the right of every property owner.

What’s more, the America The Beautiful Initiative, sometimes referred to as 30 by 30, is supported by science. Experts say that rapid loss of natural spaces coupled with climate change will result in mass extinctions of species unless we conserve at least 30% of the Earth's lands and waters by 2030. It may sound like an ambitious goal, but the United States is nearly halfway there with 12% already conserved.

The America The Beautiful Initiative is also good for business. These out-of-staters may not care about Nebraska’s economy, but protected natural areas provide millions of jobs and draw visitors that benefit local economies across the United States to the tune of nearly \$1 trillion annually. What message does American Stewards have for Nebraskans that they would deny the dignity of a hard day's work?

If voluntary land conservation is demonstrably beneficial to local communities, the economy and our planet, what is motivating American Stewards’ opposition? As is too often the case, following the money provides important insight.

Despite losing money, the group pays 94% of its revenue as salary to its husband-wife executive duo, Dan and Margaret Byfield – with more than \$700,000 coming from local taxpayers living in counties that often have trouble coming up with the resources to pay for critical services.

Sadly, there is a well-documented history of gifters suckering local governments that can least afford it out of hundreds of thousands of tax dollars in the name of fighting conservation. Some of these individuals will be on hand for the American Stewards summit. Utah State Rep. Ken Ivory spent years going county to county attempting to secure taxpayer money for his anti-conservation organization. Now he’s coming to Lincoln as a featured speaker thanks to an invite from American Stewards.

My happiest memories as a child were spent outdoors with my family on the Niobrara and watching the Sandhill cranes stop over on the Platte River as they head north. The America The Beautiful Initiative will ensure future generations of Nebraskans have the same opportunities we all did to enjoy such treasures.

American Stewards of Liberty does not share these values – neither do Ricketts and the out-of-state politicians descending on Lincoln if they are willing to align themselves with the group’s lies, conspiracy theories and fringe fearmongering.

***Kyle Herrig is a native of Omaha and the president of government watchdog Accountable.US.***

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