

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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SECRETARY MORTON STEPS UP PLANS FOR MORE NATIONAL WILDERNESS AREAS

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton said today he plans to make personal inspections this summer of areas designated or under study as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System in an effort to step up plans for creating new wilderness areas over the next three years.

The Secretary's comments came at a White House news briefing on President Nixon's request today that Congress add 14 areas totaling 1.8 million acres in nine states to the Wilderness system.

Secretary Morton explained that the Wilderness Act of 1964 requires that the Interior and Agriculture Departments review lands under their administration and recommend new wilderness areas for inclusion in the system.

"The President has given us straightforward instructions to study and recommend new areas on the basis of their pristine and scenic values," the Secretary said. "I shall be in a good many of these areas this summer, and we're accelerating our program to have them set aside for conservation purposes."

The inclusion of an area in the National Wilderness Preservation System assures that there will be no man-made improvements within it, Secretary Morton said. This would prevent development of roads, campsites or other signs or civilization and guarantee that the area retain its primeval character.

The 14 proposals submitted by the President today would expand the current wilderness system from 10.1 to 11.9 million acres. Fifty-four areas were designated in the 1964 Act. Thirty areas have been placed under the system since 1964 and, besides the 14 proposed today and 13 not acted upon by the 91st Congress, another 121 areas still are to be studied and submitted.

Secretary Morton emphasized that the lands already are in federal ownership either as parts of national forests, national parks or national wildlife refuges, and that therefore the wilderness program is unusual in that it costs the taxpayer practically nothing.

"No government purchase of land is involved, only additional discipline in the use of land already owned," President Nixon said in his message to Congress. "Administrative and management expense is tiny, for man enters these preserves only as nature's guests."

The 14 areas proposed for inclusion today are:

(1) Simeonof National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska -- 25,140 acres of a unique wildlife environment: the biologically productive lands and waters of Simeonof Island off the coast of Alaska.

(2) North Cascades National Park, Washington -- 515,880 acres in two areas in North Cascades Park and Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas. This nearly impenetrable wilderness includes rugged alpine mountains whose glaciers feed lakes and streams in the virgin forests below.

(3) Isle Royale National Park, Michigan -- 120,588 acres of island wilderness in Lake Superior. Isle Royale is one of the few remaining areas where the North American timberwolf can be found along with other relatively rare species including the moose, beaver, mink and lynx.

(4) Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, California -- 721,970 acres. With its abundant wildlife and groves of giant sequoia trees this area of the Sierra Nevada Mountains is an important site for scientific research concerning natural areas.

(5) Shenandoah National Park, Virginia -- 73,280 acres. The scenic grandeur of the Shenandoah's Blue Ridge is well known. This area is one of the few remaining examples of the vast mountain wildernesses that long ago stood as an obstacle before pioneers pushing westward.

(6) Breton National Wildlife Refuge, Louisiana -- 4,420 acres. The Chandeleur and Breton Islands of the northern Gulf of Mexico, which comprise this wilderness, are an important habitat for nesting shore birds, sea turtles and wintering waterfowl.

(7) Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuge -- 4,740 acres. Tropical vegetation, rare bird species, and Key deer native to this area are unique within the United States.

(8) West Sister National Wildlife Refuge, Ohio -- 85 acres. Located just nine miles east of Toledo, this island refuge serves as an important nesting area for egrets, herons, swallows, warblers and a host of other birds. The refuge is an exceptionally primitive landscape compared to the intensive land uses found along most of the Lake Erie shore.

(9) Chamisso National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska -- 455 acres. Located in Kotzebue Sound, this island group contains the largest marine bird nesting colony in northwestern Alaska. During annual migrations, the birds raised in this refuge contribute significantly to the abundance and variety of bird life along the coasts of Alaska, Washington, Oregon and California.

(10) Farallon National Wildlife Refuge, California -- 141 acres. These islands comprise an important sea bird rookery, hosting some 150,000 to 200,000 birds each summer -- including the largest colony complex of cormorants in California. Sea lions also inhabit the area.

(11) Izembek National Wildlife Range and Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska -- 301,451 acres. The tremendous natural biological productivity of this area supports a diverse array of wildlife; it is best known for its use by millions of waterbirds, its unique mammalian fauna and its outstanding salmon spawning waters.

(12) Cedar Breaks National Monument, Utah -- 4,370 acres. Situated on the high Markagunt Plateau of southern Utah, this monument includes a gigantic eroded natural amphitheater whose steep walls time has carved into fantastic shapes of many colors. Subalpine meadows and forests also add to the beauty of the area.

(13) Capitol Reef National Monument, Utah -- 23,054 acres. This monument provides a striking example of the Waterspocket Fold, a great doubling up of the earth's crust. Its spectacular features include a great cliff of brilliantly colored rock layers and dome-like peaks of gray and white sandstone.

(14) Arches National Monument, Utah -- 15,703 acres. Carved from the Jurassic sandstones of the Colorado Plateau, the monument exhibits many notable examples of towers, fins and deep canyons and 89 natural rock arches.

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