

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY HERBST URGES HOUSE COMMITTEE TO ADOPT ADMINISTRATION ALASKA LANDS PROPOSALS

The Carter Administration's 92.5 million acre Alaska National Interest Lands proposal was designed as a "coherent" approach to conservation in Alaska and should be adopted by the Congress, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Robert Herbst told the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee today.

The proposals include 14 additions or expansions of the National Wildlife Refuge System totaling 45.1 million acres; 13 expansions or additions to the National Park System totaling 41.77 million acres and additions to the National Forest and Wild and Scenic River systems for the balance of the acreage.

The House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee has jurisdiction over the nation's Wildlife Refuge System.

The House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee has already reported out an Alaska National Interest Lands bill which Herbst said is "in many respects, stronger and more workable than the original version" of the legislation.

"In every case the management system or approach we propose is an essential element of a coherent program to protect certain resources," Herbst said. "Modifying either the boundaries or the management systems creates the real possibility that resources will not receive the protection they need."

For example, he said, the delicate Arctic National Wildlife Range and its Porcupine Caribou Herd should be managed to protect the herd, so the Administration chose to continue management by the Fish and Wildlife Service and opted for an additional layer of protection in the form of wilderness.

The ANWR is the only complete cross section of the arctic remaining in the United States without significant industrial activity at some point between the arctic circle and the Arctic Ocean.

Herbst, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks had line responsibility for overseeing development last summer of the Alaska National Interest Lands proposals. Initially, he told the committee, he recommended adoption of a proposal covering more than 120 million acres. However, he said, Interior Secretary Cecil D. Andrus was able to cut nearly 30 million acres from those proposals by carefully matching resources and management systems and avoiding many potential use conflicts.

"Opponents of conservation in Alaska," he said, "have said the Administration is merely playing a 'numbers game' with Alaska acres. Such statements reflect either a basic misunderstanding of the Administration's proposals or a deliberate distortion of them,"

(more)

Rather, he said, the Administration is able to offer balanced recommendations for Alaska National Interest Lands aimed at protecting both the natural heritage and the economy of the State of Alaska.

Herbst also:

--Urged the committee to drop language written by the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee establishing formal procedures for opening mines in and building roads through new National Parks and Wildlife Refuges in Alaska.

--Reminded the committee that the State of Alaska has no legal right to select land withdrawn by the Secretary of the Interior under Section 17 (D) (2) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

--Told the committee the Administration was "unalterably opposed" to development of large scale agriculture within the boundaries now proposed for the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge.

--Urged the committee to remember that the major objective of the Administration's Alaska National Lands proposal is conservation.

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