

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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NO ROOM FOR TRADEOFFS IN THE ARCTIC, INTERIOR SECRETARY ANDRUS TELLS ALASKA SYMPOSIUM

"In the high latitudes there is no room left for tradeoffs -- nature doesn't bend, it breaks," Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus told an Alaska symposium at Western Washington University, Bellingham, Friday.

Speaking about the Carter Administration's 92.5 million acre proposal to designate federal lands in Alaska as units of the four national conservation systems, Andrus said "too often we try to impose our standards and values on nature. We seek compromise and tradeoffs. But in the Arctic Refuge and other parts of Alaska, the network of life is already stretched as far as it will go."

The Administration has proposed wilderness protection for the existing areas of the Arctic refuge totalling more than eight million acres. Recently the House Interior Committee mandated an oil and gas exploration program in a small but critical coastal area of the refuge that is part of the Porcupine Caribou Herd's calving grounds.

Andrus said the Arctic refuge is home to caribou, musk oxen, Barren Ground Grizzly Bears, Dall Sheep and Polar Bears. Sixteen species of fish swim in refuge waters. During the summer and fall millions of waterfowl and shorebirds use the refuge for breeding, feeding and migration staging areas.

He pointed out that the Porcupine Caribou Herd which summers in the Arctic refuge and calves on the Arctic coastal plain comprises nearly half the caribou remaining in the United States. This herd which numbers 120,000 annually migrates over millions of acres in Alaska and Canada's Yukon Territory

A single Barren Ground Grizzly may use up to 100 square miles, Andrus said.

Administration proposals call for designation of 45.1 million acres as units of the National Wildlife Refuge System and 41.7 million acres to be added to the National Park System. Additions to the Wild and Scenic River System and the National Forest System account for the balance of the acreage.

Andrus said the proposals are a "balanced" approach to conservation and development in Alaska, protecting only as much of the Alaskan land as necessary to protect its essential natural heritage.

However, he said in some places such as the Arctic National Wildlife Range, proposed for wilderness designation, the natural values "transcend the value of any mineral that might lie beneath the surface. Such minerals are finite," he said. "Production means changes whose impacts will be measured in geologic time in order to gain marginal benefits that may last a few years."