

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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CITING COURT DECISION, ANDRUS LIFTS CLOSURE OF FEDERAL LANDS TO AERIAL WOLF HUNTS IN ALASKA

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today rescinded his court-directed order that had closed Federal public lands in Alaska to aerial wolf hunts conducted by the State of Alaska.

Andrus' decision to withdraw the order, issued in March 1979 to comply with preliminary court injunctions, follows a reversal of a lower court's ruling by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C. on February 5.

The State of Alaska last year approved the wolf hunts in designated areas as part of its wildlife management program, citing the State's desire to protect dwindling numbers of moose and caribou from the predators.

Environmental groups then sued the Secretary of the Interior when he did not prohibit such hunts on Federal lands, claiming that he was required to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) before he could let the State proceed. On March 13, 1979, U.S. District Court Judge June L. Green issued a preliminary injunction, directing Andrus to stop the hunts on Federal lands until the Department prepared the EIS. On that day, Secretary Andrus closed the lands to aerial killing of wolves. The Court of Appeals overturned the District Court last week, ruling that no major Federal action was involved in the State-conducted hunt and that the Secretary was not obligated to prepare an EIS when he took no Federal action.

"It has long been my strongly held view that management of resident nonendangered wildlife on the public lands is a State prerogative," Andrus said. "Although we may have occasional differences of opinion with some States on the wisdom of some actions, the principle of State responsibility is an essential ingredient in managing resident wildlife."

For the same reason, the Secretary also today rescinded a similar court-ordered closure growing out of a proposed 1977 wolf hunt on other public lands in Alaska. In both cases, the Secretary noted that, to the extent the public lands involved have since become part of wildlife refuges or national monuments created by executive action; any proposed actions on such lands must comply with applicable laws and regulations governing such monuments or refuges. No Federal funds are used in the aerial wolf hunts. The State establishes quotas and locations and issues permits for the hunts.