DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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SECRETARY HICKEL TO RECOMMEND AGAINST WATER RESOURCE PROJECTS IF THEY THREATEN CALIFORNIA CONDORS

Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel said today that he will recommend against water resource projects near nesting areas of the endangered California condor.

The Sespe Condor Sanctuary, part of the Los Padres National Forest and administered by the Agriculture Department's Forest Service, is the only nesting area now used by this magnificent bird.

Only 60 to 80 California condors are believed remaining in existence, and this number probably is declining slowly. As North America's largest soaring land birds, adult condors weigh 20 to 25 pounds and have a wing spread of about 9 feet.

The Secretary's position will protect against reinitiation of the proposed Sespe Creek water development project. This project would have involved a reservoir near condor nesting sites on the Los Padres National Forest, but outside of the Sespe Condor Sanctuary.

The project was studied by Interior's Bureau of Reclamation at the request of, and with partial funding by, the United Water Conservation District. It was found to be physically and economically feasible in supplying additional water for the District, but a referendum on entering into a repayment contract with the Government for the project was rejected in 1966. The project has been dormant since that time and no further action is contemplated by the Bureau of Reclamation.

Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife reported on this project last January. Concerning the effects on the hard-pressed avian giants, the Bureau stated that "any unusual disturbance could tip the balance towards extinction."

The Secretary's action is the second he has taken in recent weeks to preserve this endangered bird. In March, Secretary Hickel ordered a halt on all further oil and gas leasing in the 53,000-acre Sespe Condor Sanctuary.

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