

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

news release

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NATIONAL MONUMENTS TO PROTECT UNIQUE PUBLIC LANDS IN ALASKA

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today praised President Carter's proclamation designating 56 million acres of Alaska National Interest Lands as national monuments. "This is a courageous act in the national interest to protect some of our country's great remaining natural treasures," the Interior Secretary said.

President Carter used his authority under the Antiquities Act of 1906 to designate 17 new national monuments in Alaska. These units were originally proposed as portions of the Carter Administration's Alaska National Interest Lands legislative package sent to Congress last year. That proposal covered 92.5 million acres of additions to the four national conservation systems -- national parks, national wildlife refuges, wild and scenic rivers and national forests -- as well as 49 million acres of wilderness overlays including several million acres in the Tongass and Chugach National Forests.

President Carter's proclamation covers 13 units to be administered by the National Park Service, two units to be managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service and two National Forests units which will continue to be managed by the Forest Service, an agency of the Department of Agriculture. The Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture recommended that the President designate the monuments.

Included within the new monuments are the nation's largest unpolluted river valley, portions of the nation's highest peak, the nation's largest group of peaks over 15,000 feet, the place where man may have first entered the New World, an archeological record of man's past in the Arctic going back at least 4,000 years, prime habitat for Alaska brown bears, nesting sites for millions of waterfowl that return each fall to 47 other states, and the nation's largest remaining virgin forest.

"These proclamations," Secretary Andrus said, "were required to protect scientific, cultural, historic and living resources no longer available in any other part of our country. The value of these areas was clearly recognized this year when the House of Representatives passed by a vote of 277-31 legislation very similar to the Administration's proposals. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee also reported out Alaska lands legislation. It was only the threat of an end-of-session filibuster by one Senator which blocked Congressional passage of a more sweeping Alaska National Interest lands legislation.

"Once Congress had failed to act we knew that administrative action would be necessary," Andrus said. "The withdrawals which had protected much of this land expire at midnight December 16. The threat that some of these lands might be claimed or staked, fragmenting their environmental integrity, or put into limbo beneath a pile of legal pleadings, was one which we simply could not accept.

(more)

"We will return to Congress in January with proposed Alaska lands legislation. While we have moved to protect these important lands and their resources using our administrative authorities, our goal is still passage of legislation to designate all of these areas as units of the national conservation systems.

"Use of the Antiquities Act was confined to those areas whose values were most clearly of the scientific and historic sort which the Act was designed to protect," Andrus said.

"Those areas which were not designated all contain immensely valuable natural resources worthy of permanent protection. We have begun the necessary procedures under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to make final withdrawals on all the proposed conservation units which were not designated as monuments. Once completed, the final withdrawals would become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service," Andrus said.

The monuments proclaimed by the President are: Aniakchak NM (350,000 acres); Bering Land Bridge NM (2.6 million acres); Cape Krusenstern NM (560,000 acres); Denali NM (enlargement of Mount McKinley National Park, 3.9 million acres); Gates of the Arctic NM (8.2 million acres); Glacier Bay NM (enlargement 550,000 acres); Katmai NM (enlargement 1.4 million acres); Kenai Fjords NM (570,000 acres); Kobuk Valley NM (1.7 million acres); Lake Clark NM (2.5 million acres); Noatak NM (5.8 million acres); Wrangell-St. Elias NM (11 million acres); Yukon-Charley NM (1.7 million acres); Yukon Flats NM (10.6 million acres); Becharof NM (1.2 million acres); Admiralty Island (Forest Service, 1.1 million acres); Misty Fjords (Forest Service, 2.2 million acres).

Secretary Andrus said the proclamations for all areas except Kenai Fjords permit continued subsistence hunting by rural Alaskans, most of whom are Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts. There is no record of contemporary subsistence hunting onshore in the Kenai Fjords area. "The opportunity for Alaskans to continue in their traditional subsistence pursuits is important to me and the Department," Andrus said. "It would be ironic and unfair to protect this land and at the same time injure the traditional people who live nearby and depend on this land for their livelihood."

The two national monuments administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service will be managed according to wildlife refuge rules which allow sport hunting. Sport hunting in two national forest monuments will be managed according to national forest regulations.

The monuments are closed to mineral entry and leasing.

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