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Photo by Tom Grote

Sen. James McClure watches television in his Payette Lake cabin after saying he'll step down.

McClure's mountain refuge

BY TOM GROTE

The Star-News

On Sunday, two days after announcing he would not seek to return to the U.S. Senate, James McClure did something totally unstatesmanlike - he sat around and watched football.

That kind of activity is typical of what the senior senator from Idaho does at his cabin in McCall - his only Idaho home and his retreat from the pressures of public life.

McClure and his wife, Louise, flee to their log cabin on Payette Lake whenever they can to escape the rigors of Washington, D.C., to spend time with friends and family and to ponder weighty decisions, such as his choice not to seek a fourth term.

The McClures arrived at their rustic cabin in exclusive Wagon

"You can build a fire in the fireplace, sit and read. It's total relaxation."

- Sen. James McClure

Wheel Bay in mid-December and spent the next three weeks making up their minds that McClure should step down.

After his dramatic announcement in Boise on Friday, the couple returned to their McCall home. On Sunday, the McClures spent the day with old friends - Boise construction executive Dick Wilcomb and his wife, Pat, and U.S. District Court Judge Hal Ryan and his wife, Ann.

While he watched the Los Angeles Rams battle the New York Giants, McClure described

the pleasure he feel when he arrives in McCall.

"It's such a change of pace," said McClure, 65. "You're not on a tight schedule - you can build a fire in the fireplace, sit and read. It's total relaxation, total disengagement."

The McClures purchased the 55-year-old cabin in 1980. They had it winterized, and McClure has spent his spare time in home remodeling.

The selection of Payette Lake as their home from all the available places in Idaho was an easy

choice, McClure said. Raised in Payette, he spent much of his boyhood years tromping around the forests in the region.

He said he would often spend time in the Seven Devils Mountains near Riggins, in the Cuddy Mountain area near Cambridge and in Burgdorf, north of McCall, where his grandfather operated a placer gold mine.

"I did backpacking before it became a popular sport and did salmon fishing on the South Fork of the Salmon before it got too crowded," he said.

The cabin has served its purpose well, said Louise, 62. "It's a haven, such a contrast to what we have in Washington," she said. "I can take my shoes off, go without lipstick and sleep in."

Louise spends the high part of (See "McClure," Back Page)

McClure

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each summer at the Payette Lake home, which serves as an ideal setting to entertain their three children and five grandchildren, who are spread from Portland to Denver.

The McClures own a fishing boat and a water-ski boat. The senator also owns a trail bike that he uses for summer runs in the woods with friends, "if they don't close all my roads," he said in a laughing reference to his policy battles with the U.S. Forest Service.

In winter, the couple dabbles in cross-country skiing, but McClure mostly enjoys curling up with a good book by the fire.

The couple usually is only able to visit their Idaho home a day or two at a time after the senator makes his necessary rounds around the state visiting constituents.

Lately, however, McClure said they have been arranging their schedules so that trips can last up to a week.

After January, of course, there will be a lot more opportunity to stay at home, but McClure said he is not about to become a recluse.

"I don't want to just retire, I want to have some involvement in Idaho," he said. He said he could easily restart his law practice that he abandoned after entering Congress, and he thinks he could offer good advice to corporations as members of their boards of directors.

Louise said she has enjoyed her Washington experience, but that Idaho will always be home.

"We could have gone back for two years, but six years, no," she said. "Here, you know who your friends are, and your friends are real."