

# Watt is defended on land policies

By BEN J. PLASTINO  
Post-Register political editor

Secretary of Interior James Watt is a controversial figure but information has been submitted to show that he has violated no laws.

In fact, at the recent Western Governor's Conference at Jackson, Wyo., all of the western governor, including Idaho Gov. John V. Evans, lauded his performance. The all Republican Idaho congressional delegation warmly support his policies, as does the Republican controlled Idaho Legislature.

For the most part, he received warm praise by the governors and many other speakers at the conference.

Idaho Republican Party Chairman Dennis M. Olsen, Idaho Falls attorney, sent information about Watt which touches on some of the controversies.

In each instant, it shows that Watt has followed the law.

For example, the charge that Watt places a much higher priority on development and exploitation than on conservation and protection, it was submitted the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended, mandates that the secretary of interior manage America's national lands with strict guidelines.

Watt also said in congressional committee hearings, that he has continually



James Watt

stated and will not allow—not does he plan to allow—hardrock mining, oil or gas exploring or development or logging to be permitted in any public lands—whether they be national parks, wilderness areas or refuges—where such activities are prohibited by law.

On the claim that Watt plans to overturn laws that protect the environment, the answer is given that Watt has testified before the Congress and has outlined in public speeches that he supports present environmental protection laws. He adds the Department of Interior has not proposed—nor does it plan to propose—any overhaul of environmental laws under which the department operates. He said he is reorganizing and streamlining interior department programs in order that they "do a better job of protecting the environment and do it more economically."

He also says he enjoys the outdoors immensely, pointing out he was born, raised and educated on the plain of Wyoming, in answer to charges he dislikes outdoor life.

On the charge that he ordered the interior department to design its policies in order to help the U.S. minerals industry, Watt said he has never nor would it be legal or proper for him to direct the interior department to issue policies for the sole purpose of financially assisting any specific industry or company.

He said he does share the concern of the U.S. Congress, that earlier administrations have failed to implement public laws, and as a result the United States is importing from foreign nations strategically important minerals. He added that he and President Reagan discussed the

need to develop a strategic minerals policy so that America would be ensured access to the minerals which are vital to the national security and quality of life.

On the claim the interior department plans to needlessly slaughter 5,000 wild horses and burros, he points out they have grown to overpopulations—presently number more than 70,000—which have destroyed public ranges. A federal law passed by Congress requires removing excess wild horses and burros, destroying old, sick or lame animals, capturing additional excess animals and make them available for private maintenance, and destroy excess animals for which they are no adoption demand.

He also said he has not planned excessive budget cuts as a means to eliminate the Endangered Species Program, only that it share in the reduction in the federal budget. He said he believes that preventing the extinction of endangered wildlife and plants is very important.

To a charge that he is out to sabotage the Environmental Impact Statement Process, he said that to the contrary, he has directed the interior department to improve this process to make it more valuable, less costly and a greater tool in making land use decisions.

Watt also denies the allegations of some groups that his five-year offshore leasing program leases too much offshore area, ignores environmental laws and regulations, and usurps all powers of the coastal states.

He said his off shore leasing program provides for an equitable sharing of developmental benefits and environmental consideration among regions.