

Cecil D. Andrus yearns for 1

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

WASHINGTON — And just how is Secretary of Interior Cecil D. Andrus getting along these days?

Just fine, he said, but he's always looking to coming back to his beloved Idaho, although he frankly admits he doesn't know just in what capacity.

He returned to the humid capital of the United States after a jaunt last weekend into the Gem States, primarily to speak to the third University of Idaho Wilderness Resource conference at Moscow, then making a brief visit to Lewiston and Boise.

In his telephone interview with the Post-Register, he reiterated his strong support for transferring the U.S. Forest Service from the Department of Agriculture to a proposed new Department of Natural Resources, mostly made up of the agencies of the existing interior department. It also would shift the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration from the Department of Commerce to Interior.

Andrus admits the proposal

faces tough sledding in Congress where it is now under consideration.

Enlarge department

The shift would bring 22,000 employees to the Forest Service and 12,800 from the NOAA to augment 55,000 Interior employees, increasing the permanent staff under his supervision to 89,800.

The entrenched constituency likes to keep the status quo," said Andrus, "but I feel the American people demand more efficient government for their tax dollars, and I believe they will get behind this proposal. These entrenched people serve a narrow special interest."

It's not a new proposal, he said, but has been proposed for 50 years.

Andrus sharply criticized the defeat of Robert Lenaghan by the Idaho Senate for another term as president of the Idaho Public Utilities Commission, terming it "strictly political, because Lenaghan was a powerful friend of the consumer, something the Republicans didn't like."

He also pointed out that, when

governor in 1975, he had advocated property tax reform, warning the tax initiative would be inaugurated by people.

Andrus says he feels comfortable as secretary of interior, even though the average tenure has been only 27 months for this position. Already he has served more than three years and appears solid for the remaining year of the Carter term, and perhaps even four more years if Carter is re-elected.

He said Carter seldom gives him direction, except basically to ask questions on certain matters.

"I feel he trusts me," said Andrus. "I feel in this atmosphere of public relations and political posture, I hold a strong position at this time."

Wins court decision

In state affairs, he noted he won a Supreme Court decision which ruled a veto is allowable 10 days after the governor receives a bill, not just when it is approved by the Legislature. The bill in question was one that would have placed all state attorneys under the attorney general's office.

Andrus said he felt the governor should have a free hand in legal advice, not subject to an attorney general who could be hostile.

He noted Idaho's present attorney general, David H. Leroy "is eager and ambitious."

Queried why he rolled up such an impressive 72 percent majority for re-election in 1976 he said, "People will respond to honest good government, but they don't usually re-elect the politicos. "The best politics is good government."

This writer personally visited Andrus at his spacious office in the huge Department of Interior building in November, 1977, and found Andrus relaxed and immensely enjoying his job.

In noting the esteem in which Andrus is held, President Carter told this writer in a White House conference at that time that he (Carter) had come to Idaho in 1976 to help Andrus, and now Andrus was in Washington to help him.



Post-Register/Ben J. Plastino

Interior's boss

WASHINGTON — Secretary of Interior Cecil D. Andrus sits at his desk in the huge Department of Interior where he is boss of

some 55,000 employees. He is a former Idaho governor before taking the present position three years ago.

his return to beloved Idaho

Andrus said one of his greatest accomplishments since being in office is getting a nationwide strip mining bill passed which guarantees that land with surface mines will be recognized as under temporary use, and after this mining is done, the land is to be restored and used for other purposes.

Also high on the achievement list are amendments to the outer continental shelf law which permits him to lease oil and gas lands in a manner that will protect the environment; see that the onshore lands be protected from undue impact of statement government; and protection of the remaining Redwoods in California.

Andrus said he was especially pleased at the passage last year of the Rangeland Protective Act which will permit the interior department to start rehabilitation of public rangelands of Western America.

Andrus contended 70 percent of all public lands "is either fair

or poor" condition.

Andrus said a \$68 million appropriation was obtained this year to start the rangeland improvements.

The biggest failure last year, said Andrus, "was not resolving the Alaskan land issue."

A total of 92.5 million acres was asked to be reserved for forest service. He added 95 percent of the best land and 75 percent of the best hardrock minerals were left outside of the boundaries.

"We protected the crown jewels of this land," said Andrus. "The president took executive action under the Antiquities Act to give this protection."

Andrus noted the president protected 56 million acres, and under an order he withdrew an additional 60 million acres but this can be lifted later.

"I want to point out that unless this was done the American taxpayers would have to buy up the holdings and

The Post-Register

The political pulse

A-12

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Thursday, May 3, 1979

this makes no sense."

Wilderness study

Andrus noted the wilderness study under the Bureau of Land Management was begun last year and the first screen will be completed in two years. He explained that areas that don't qualify will be dropped.

"We have started an intensive study and we are learning from our mistakes," he said.

In other views, he said the grazing fee disputes are being worked out satisfactorily; that rebuilding of the collapsed Te-

ton Dam would only be considered when backed by the governor and congressional delegation; and that the 160-acre limitation should be enlarged to make it more realistic for the present time. One proposal would permit expansion of an ownership of up to 1,280 acres for a large family, he noted.

And about Idaho, he pointed out he had placed Idaho on a balanced budget after coming into office and facing a \$11 million deficit.