Andrus asked Carter to drop new department

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Secretary of Interior Cecil D. Andrus disclosed Friday he had persuaded President Carter to drop plans for a proposed new Department of Natural Resources.

"It was I who asked President Carter to abandon the reorganization for a Department of Natural Resources because I felt too much time had elapsed and the matter had become devisive," said Andrus.

"There were many other major issues that are under discussion and I felt it was not worth the cost to the administration to press for the new department."

Andrus said in The Post-Register telephone interview that he felt President Carter had enough troubles with the SALT II and Panama Canal treaties; gasoline allocations, decontrol and rationing, and other major issues, without a controversy over a new department at this time.

The secretary, former Idaho governor, said he believes the new department is an excellent idea and probably can be revived after Carter is re-elected in 1980.

"The possibilities of passing the reorganization would be slim at this time," Andrus acknowledged. "Many of the major committee chairmen are under terrific pressure from the timber and mining interests. It would be a donneybrook at this time, and is not worth the terrific effort it would take."

The reorganization primarily would have shifted the Forest Service from the USDA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Interior, to be renamed the Department of Natural Resources.

In Salt Lake

Andrus was at Salt Lake City Saturday to discuss water problems with Utah Gov. Scott Matheson and other Western governors.

The discussion, he said, centers on reserved federal water rights, that should be determined as to the amount of water that is actually needed, not the amount of water than can legally be claimed.

He explained the West has always asked reserved water rights on federal lands.

"Everyone," he added, "recognizes this, but it has not been determined on the matter of water allocation."

He pointed out reserved water rights can pre-empt other rights if a water basin over allocates.

"It is not the intent of this administration to pre-empt any personal water nor pre-empt the state in water rights," said Andrus.

Wilderness bill

In another matter, Andrus said that in his opinion the Senate version of the Wilderness bill will pass, rather than that of the House which is more liberal in designating wilderness areas.

"I suspect," he said, "the conference committee's bill will be very close to what the Carter administration recommended."

Andrus expressed hope the wilderness issue will be settled by the end of the calendar year.

Andrus noted RARE II proposals vary widely from state to state.

In Idaho, he contended the Forest Service added wilderness areas that should not have been so designated.

"We have a timber industry that is important in this state," said Andrus, who indicated some areas north of the Salmon River should not be designated wilderness.

"Across the nation, however, I believe RARE II proposals are reasonable," he said.

He said he believed the Carter Administration's proposal for 1.9 million acres in the Central Idaho wilderness is "a fair proposal."

Andrus said the primitive area decision should have precedence over the new RARE II, because it has been under consideration since 1931.

He said he heartily agrees with Carter's desire to bring the budget into line and not try to "spend on champagne level with a beer salary."