

Wilderness solution urged

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U.S. Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, said in a Post-Register interview while in Idaho Falls he is interested in bringing to final conclusion the designation of wilderness land.

He also repeated his stout defense for the controversial Secretary of Interior James Watt, adding the secretary is complying with all laws and is only seeking a more even balance between natural resource development and protection of the environment. McClure added he agrees with Watt the scales have tipped too far in favor of the environmental protection.

McClure, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, explained the final decision must be made on what land is to be retained for wilderness designation and multiple use. He said some 3 million acres in Idaho are involved in this controversy.

McClure said the decision on the land affects not only Idaho, but 10 other Western States. New Mexico and Colorado have pretty well decided on their designations, he explained.

He said he is pressing for the RARE II Review Act of 1981. It has two primary purposes: to ratify and endorse the long and difficult RARE II process, and to release statutorily those national forest system lands not included in wilderness designation, within a specified period of time, for multiple use management.

One piece of legislation, SB 842, would make it clear that the management of RARE II non-wilderness areas would be available for multiple use, he noted.

He added statutory release of non-wilderness lands would validate the RARE II decision and give the Forest Service the ability to plan ahead as it must do.

He added the time limits of say, six years, would encourage Congress to decide expeditiously whether land should or should not be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Lack of action on RARE II lands amounts to de facto wilderness without statutory direction.

"Long-term planning is essential to a wide variety of uses, included in the category of multiple use," he said.

"No compromise was reached last year on releasing non-wilderness lands. The language which was developed was a step forward. It would serve as a basis to work from, and that during the upcoming Congress this year and next year would work hard to modify and expand this language."

In defense of Watt, McClure said Watt is following guidelines but acknowledges he is more combative than he should be.

He pointed out, for example, that Watt was criticized for dismantling the Office of Surface Mining. However, said McClure, Watt is following the law in turning over this office functions to the states as rapidly as they are ready.

"This should have been done years ago," said McClure.

"Watt is doing a superb job," asserted McClure. "He is a thoroughly honest, totally moral man. He does get the issues on the table, then makes the decisions."

McClure said Watt is in constant contact with the president and cabinet and he feels Watt has solid support, despite the outcries for his ouster among environmentalists.

McClure said there is a growing crisis on dependency in the United States on minerals export from other countries. He said the United States is 50 to 100 percent dependent on exports for many essential minerals.

McClure has proposed a land swap between ASARCO, Inc., and the federal government in facilitating mining. He acknowledged there's currently a surplus of molybdenum in the United States so whatever is mined would need to be exported.

McClure said The White Clouds was not an issue in 1970 when Cecil Andrus was elected governor over Republican Gov. Don Samuelson. Andrus objected to mining while Samuelson was in favor.

He contended Andrus would have been elected, even if White Clouds hadn't existed, indicating it was largely other factors.

McClure said he solidly supports Reagan in his foreign as well as his domestic policies. He said in regards to the recent incident with Libya in which American naval planes shot down two Libyan planes, "it's high time that if anyone shoots at our planes, we shoot back."

He also said he saw no difficulties in Hal Ryan, Idaho attorney, becoming confirmed U.S. attorney for Idaho despite some charges by critics that he has extreme right wing views.

McClure also said the farm policy is excellent in letting farmers have control of their own destinies and reducing subsidies, such as those invoked for dairy. McClure said he heartily supported Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block's views as expounded in his key talk here at the East Idaho Republican Barbecue and Rally last week.

He also said Congress must recognize its obligation in the farm policy when farmers are affected by federal actions in the foreign and domestic agricultural sectors.