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UDALL INTRODUCES NEW ALASKA LANDS BILL

Calling the proposal one which "advances the interests of all the parties on all fronts," Rep. Morris K. Udall, D-Ariz., today introduced an Alaska lands bill to amend the Senate's version of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Udall, chairman of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs and a principal author of the Alaska lands bills passed in 1978 and 1979, was joined in sponsoring the new measure by Acting Chairman of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, Rep. Thomas Ashley, Rep. Tom Evans of Delaware, Rep. John Seiberling of Ohio, and Rep. Les AuCoin of Oregon.

"This (Udall-Evans) bill represents our best judgement about where a final compromise on the numerous and complex issues that divide the House and Senate Alaska lands bills may ultimately lie," Udall said.

Acknowledging that House and Senate leaders have been meeting for days in an effort to iron out these differences, Udall said: "We are offering these amendments not because our negotiations with the Senate have succeeded, but because they have not been successful."

Rep. John Dingell, a senior member of the committee with jurisdiction over wildlife refuges, made several recommendations that were incorporated into the bill.

Udall said that since late August, after the Senate passed its Alaska lands bill, he and other backers of the House bill had consulted with other Members of the House and numerous outside interest groups to determine what necessary amendments had to be made.

"We believe strongly that the Senate bill can and must be improved so that the concerns of a broad range of interests are addressed, including sport hunters, the State of Alaska, its native communities, miners, the oil and gas industry, timber harvesters and fishermen, as well as the environmentalists," Udall said.

Udall indicated that the Udall-Evans amendment package proposes these improvements to the Senate-passed Alaska Lands bill:

-- For sport hunters, the opening to sport hunting of an additional million acres of prime hunting areas in the Wrangell-St. Elias, Denali and Lake Clark National Parks. This would bring the total acreage of national park preserves (a designation used to allow sport hunting) to more than 20 million acres, more than three million acres additionally than in the House bill.

-- For the State of Alaska, allowing the state to select lands to which it is not now entitled in the Selawik, Koyukule, Nowitna and Arctic refuges, the southern Steese area near Fairbanks, and other lands within House-designated conservation units. These areas would be offset by deletion from the Senate bill of sections conveying to the State the Your Creek and Circle Benchlands areas, and by return of the north Steese area to the Yukon flats Refuge.

The bill would also permit the State to overselect and "top file" land selections throughout the Federal lands in Alaska, except for conservation system units, national forests, and the National Petroleum Reserve -- Alaska. It also conveys 35 million acres to the State and allows an additional 10 years for completion of the State's selection of lands under the Statehood Act.

For the oil and gas industry, the House would recede to the Senate's provision for the seismic studies (preceding Congressional approval of a full-scale exploration program) of the coastal plain of the Douglas Arctic Wildlife Range.

For the timber industry in Southeast Alaska, the bill would accept the Senate's mandate that an average of 450 million board feet of timber be made available each year from the Tongass National Forest and the Senate bill's requirement that \$40 million be available annually for road building and other activities to assure achievement of that objective.

For conservationists, the bill adjusts the size and location of wilderness areas in the state to add 3.5 million acres above the Senate figure, for a total of 60 million acres, 7.5 million acres less than the House bill.

The bill would also protect the Karta, Rocky Pass and East-West Chichagof areas in Southeast Alaska, reduce the U.S. Borax wilderness exclusion in the Misty Fjords National Monument to one-third of the Senate figure and add the designation of a Copper River Wildlife Refuge.

"This is a reasonable, forthright package of amendments," Udall said. "It will be clear to anyone who examines this proposal with an open mind that we are conceding far more than we are demanding, and that we are not seeking total victory, but a reasonable settlement all sides can live with."

Udall emphasized that although negotiations with the Senate to date have not produced any tangible agreements, he expects that discussions can continue in an effort to see if agreements can be reached. He said he expects that when Congress returns to its post-election session in November, the House will pass and send to the Senate a bill similar to that introduced today.

"After the Senate passage of the amendments, House passage of the Senate's Alaska lands bill will be assured," Udall said.

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