

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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ANDRUS SAYS ALASKAN LANDS LAW DEMONSTRATES UNITED EFFORT TO PROTECT NATION'S NATURAL BEAUTY

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus said the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, signed today by President Carter, represents "a national commitment to the quality of life for future generations of Americans.

"This law is the culmination of a nine-year national effort to protect the awesome wonders of our largest state as a part of a great legacy of beauty and nature that is the birthright of every American," Andrus said.

"This was the paramount conservation priority of the Carter Administration and we are proud and pleased to have attained it. It will take many years to implement all its provisions but I am sure that all concerned can move forward now to develop the potential--public and private--of the 49th state."

Andrus said the law provides several landmarks in natural resource planning. It doubles the size of the National Park System with 13 new or expanded areas, doubles the size of the National Wildlife Refuge System with 15 new or expanded areas, expands by three times the National Wilderness Preservation System and almost doubles the number and miles of rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The law protects about 104 million of Alaska's 365 million acres, approximately the same amount of land the state will receive under the Alaska Statehood legislation. In addition, Alaskan Natives will receive 44 million acres under terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

"While protecting Alaska's 'Crown Jewels' this law also provides for the orderly and sensitive development of timber, oil, gas and valuable minerals, mandates speedy conveyance of millions of acres due the state of Alaska and Alaska Natives under previous laws, protects the subsistence hunting traditions of rural Alaskans and provides for mineral surveys for protected areas with oil and gas potential," he said.

"I am convinced that this law is sufficiently balanced that all concerned can work with it and make plans according to its provisions. It will put behind us the overwhelming majority of divisive questions which have delayed vital decisions about development and preservation."

(over)

The Interior Secretary said he believes "passage of this law shows that our system does work, that major issues can be decided by the Legislative Branch of our government through the efforts of people of good will and civility. I am impressed with the dedication shown by many members of the Congress during the very long debate on these issues.

"This law contains most of the points we wanted. Improvements can be worked out in the next Congress, but meanwhile, these precious lands will be protected by law."

Andrus credited "tenacious support" by President Carter as a major factor in the passage of the Alaska legislation. "But this has been a nine-year effort, supported by the two previous Administrations and helped along at every turn of the way by many, many dedicated people--some working effectively as members of conservation organizations, others as individuals concerned with the preservation of the nation they love.

"The history of mankind is full of examples of nations selling their birth-right for some short term advantage which has cost them dearly over the long run. I am proud to have been a part of a successful effort to secure for posterity a national treasure which could never be duplicated or recreated anywhere on the face of the earth."

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