

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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REED ASKS CONGRESS FOR MORE WILDERNESS AREAS

A Senate subcommittee today heard Interior Assistant Secretary Nathaniel P. Reed urge the creation of 14 new wilderness areas, from Florida to Alaska, for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Seven of the areas would be administered by the National Park Service and seven by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Reed oversees the activities of both these Interior bureaus.

His plea for the new wilderness areas was presented to the Subcommittee on Public Lands of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. The subcommittee hearings had been scheduled to consider two bills currently before Congress -- S. 2453 which would designate 11 wilderness areas, and S. 3119 which would set aside certain wilderness lands within the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. (All the areas are now in national parks or refuges.)

The areas proposed in S. 2453 are among a total of 14 wilderness areas recommended by President Nixon in a message he sent to Congress in April 1971. The President also affirmed his support of the Cedar Keys Wilderness proposal, which was first introduced in the 90th Congress.

Today Assistant Secretary Reed asked for amendments to the two Senate bills to embrace all the areas recommended by the President pointing out the fragility and uniqueness that make each a choice for preservation in a natural state.

Reed also asked for deferral of consideration on the proposed Izembek Wilderness in Alaska (listed in S. 2453) because a portion of the designated land is now subject to selection rights of Alaskan Natives under terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

Summaries of Reed's remarks concerning each proposed area are attached.

PROPOSED WILDERNESS AREAS WITHIN WILDLIFE REFUGES

Farallon National Wildlife Refuge. 141 acres to be set aside within this refuge which consists of the emerged land of four rugged and picturesque island groups 28 miles offshore from San Francisco, Calif. The proposed wilderness area would include all the islands except the 70-acre southeast Farallon Island where a manned lighthouse is maintained. The refuge harbors some 200,000 nesting sea birds of 11 species, including the largest cormorant colony on the Pacific Coast south of Alaska. California and Stellar sea lions also congregate on the rocky, foggy isles.

Chamisso National Wildlife Refuge. This entire area of the Arctic is proposed for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. It lies in Kotzebue Sound at the mouth of Eschacholtz Bay, Alaska. The refuge consists of Chamisso Island--435 acres of volcanic rocky outcropping and sandspit; and precipitous 10-acre Puffin Island. Harbor seals, and the only extensive colonies of seabirds in the Arctic region of Alaska are found here, in some 33 species. Arctic hares and foxes are winter residents.

West Sister Island National Wildlife Refuge. All of this 85-acre island refuge in Lake Erie, lying 15 miles east of Toledo, Ohio, is recommended for wilderness. Public access is now controlled by permit. Formed from limestone rock shaped by glacial action, the island rises to 35 feet above the high water mark, and 50-foot hackberry trees and grassland fringe comprise its vegetation. An historic lighthouse, automated in 1937, is checked four or five times a year by the Coast Guard.

Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuge. The Florida Keys Wilderness proposal includes parts of the National Key Deer Refuge; the Great White Heron Refuge; the Key West Refuge, all of which are in Monroe County, Fla., situated on a massive coral reef which rose to sea level 50,000 years ago. Visitor use of these areas is already limited to protect nesting birds, including the threatened southern bald eagle, the brown pelican and the American osprey. The sandy beaches of the Key West Refuge are important to loggerhead sea turtles, and the endangered American alligator finds refuge throughout these areas. The total proposed wilderness would take in about 4,740 acres on 30 keys, all regions currently maintained in natural state without roads or improvements.

Simeonof National Wildlife Refuge. With the exclusion of the marine waters and 131 acres of emerged lands containing ranch buildings, all of Simeonof Island refuge is recommended for the wilderness system. The refuge in the Gulf of Alaska was established in 1958 primarily for the protection of some 500 sea otters and some 1,000 hair seals. Fifty-five species of birds, including the bald eagle, have also been identified on the island. Simeonof had a long history of cattle and fox farming from 1896 to 1930, with cattle re-introduced in 1962. Erosion from cattle trails and potential for introduced pests are negative aspects of grazing, and the Fish and Wildlife Service plans to terminate the 20 year grazing permit when it expires.

Breton National Wildlife Refuge. This crescent-shaped chain of barrier islands in the Gulf of Mexico, about 12 miles offshore from the Mississippi delta, was established in 1904 by President Theodore Roosevelt. The whole 4,000-plus-acre area is now proposed for wilderness with the exception of several acres under lease to Kerr-McGee Oil Industries. Any future use of oil and gas under the refuge will be done by directional drilling from off-refuge sites, and no developments are planned on the refuge. Bird rookeries and turtle nesting sites are prevalent.

Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. This 378-acre island refuge north of Tampa, Fla., is proposed in toto as a wilderness area. It comprises four islands -- Seahorse, Snake, Deadman and North Keys -- part of a larger complex known as Cedar Keys. The Levy County Board of Commissioners and the City Council of the nearby town of Cedar Keys had suggested that Seahorse be deleted from the wilderness proposal and preserved by the State, county or civic groups for recreational purposes. However, citizen response at the public hearings was in favor of wilderness designation. The refuge provides habitat for over 200 nesting pairs of endangered brown pelicans; 37 pairs of ospreys, the largest group in the Eastern part of the country; and as many as 150,000 white ibis.

PROPOSED WILDERNESS AREAS WITHIN NATIONAL PARKS

Sequoia/Kings Canyon. 721,970 acres of this total area of 847,193 acres is proposed for wilderness-state preservation. The two parks are distinguished by giant sequoia trees and the Sierra Nevada range which rises to its loftiest altitudes here. Nearly two million people visit the two parks annually. The fragile alpine backcountry's appeal to backpackers has created a visitor use problem of major proportions.

North Cascades. The North Cascades Complex in northwestern Washington consists of North Cascades National Park and Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas, for a total of 674,000 acres. The Park is an awesome region of sharply eroded mountains containing one-third of the glaciers found within the Lower 48 States. Impounded reaches of the Skagit and Stehekin Rivers, which drain most of the higher park land, are contained within the Recreation Areas. In 1971 more than 200,000 people visited the complex. The proposed wilderness would take 515,880 acres.

Isle Royale. This wild and beautiful archipelago, situated in Lake Superior, is a 539,338-acre national park of which nearly four-fifths are submerged lands. Communities of wolves and moose make their homes there, the only such communities in the National Park System outside Alaska. The wilderness area proposal would encompass 120,588 acres. Existing camping facilities would be maintained and any expansion of camping facilities would be limited to protect the fragile north woods ecosystem.

Shenandoah. 73,280 acres of this 193,533-acre park along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia would be set aside as wilderness. Its primary resources are scenic forested mountains, animal life, and human history involving mountain people, the Nation's westward movement, and the Civil War.

*Cedar Breaks. This is a National Monument established to preserve a gigantic multicolored natural amphitheater within which limestone has been eroded into fantastic shapes. Over 300,000 people now visit there each year, and facilities for their use are concentrated along the scenic rim drive extending the length of the Monument. Wilderness area designation is proposed for 4,370 acres of the total 6,154 acres of the Monument. It was suggested in a 1967 public hearing that the wilderness be enlarged by adding the strip of land between the rim of the "breaks" and the monument road. However, that strip of land is highly developed for visitor use and receives concentrated sightseeing use.

*Arches. Formerly Arches National Monument, but established recently as Arches National Park, this region in southeastern Utah consists of canyons and mountainous formations of rugged red sandstone resembling arches and towers. The Act which made the area a National Park provides that within three years of enactment the Secretary of the Interior shall make recommendations as to the suitability of any area within it for preservation as a wilderness. Of the 34,010 acres, 15,703 are recommended now for wilderness status.

*Capitol Reef. Like Arches, this area was originally designated as a National Monument but recently its status was reconstituted to that of a National Park. In south-central Utah, its principal feature is the Capitol Reef, an unusual earthuplift intricately dissected by deep gorges in multi-colored rocks. Of a total of 39,173 acres, 23,054 are recommended for wilderness preservation. Three canyons incising Wilderness Units 2 through 5 were not recommended as wilderness because of their use as authorized stock driveways for a section to the west that is grazed by permit.

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NOTE: Those proposed wilderness areas in National Parks that are designated by an asterisk are not at present included in S. 2453, but are recommended by Assistant Secretary Reed for inclusion by amendment to the bill.