

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

news release

For Release 10 a.m. EST, November 6, 1978

## ALASKA MAKES TIME CAPSULE OF FOOLISHNESS OUT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SCARS WHICH WOULD HEAL QUICKLY IN SOUTHEAST, SECRETARY ANDRUS WARNS

Scars which heal in a generation in the Southeastern United States would mar the land for centuries in Alaska, Interior Secretary Cecil D. Andrus emphasized today in keynoting the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies convention at Hot Springs, Va.

In reaffirming that protection of National Interest Lands in Alaska remains his No. 1 legislative priority, Andrus contrasted the healing power of nature in the balmy Southeast with that in Alaska. He cited areas in the Great Smokies and Piedmont which had been ravaged by misuse early this century, but which now were restored with lush vegetation and abundant wildlife.

"But neither of these examples -- Great Smoky Mountains nor Piedmont -- could be duplicated in Alaska," Andrus said. "That land does not offer the luxury of second chances. On the Aleutian Islands you can see mechanized vehicle tracks deeply -- and to the untrained eye freshly -- etched in the ground. You might think the Army has just held maneuvers on the Island. But these tank tracks were made more than 30 years ago during World War II."

Andrus also noted that the first attempts to ram a winter road through to the North Slope oil fields more than a decade ago had resulted in a morass of stagnant pools of water that widen and deepen a little more every year.

"Alaska is a time capsule for our past foolishness," Andrus said. "The landscape and climate are not as forgiving as here in the Southeast."

Andrus said he is disappointed that some sportsmen's groups had misinterpreted proposed Administration policies on hunting in Alaska.

"Inappropriately and ironically, some of the groups came out four-square for the most extreme of the developer interests," Andrus said. "I think they did themselves, the proposed legislation, and conservation a great disservice."

"Acting in haste, these sportsmen groups fell victim to those who called our proposals a 'lockup,' those who said we wanted to turn Alaska into a playground for the rich."

Andrus added: "Had they looked, they would have seen that all the refuges would have been open to hunting, that there would have been hunting in the preserve areas around the national parks, that overall, more than 90 per cent of Alaska would be open to sport hunting."

"Alaska would not be locked up nor would hunters be locked out under our proposals," Andrus said.

(more)

Congress adjourned last month without meeting its self-imposed deadline of designating national parks, wild and scenic rivers, wildlife refuges, national forests and wilderness areas on the Federal lands in Alaska. Andrus restated the intention of the Administration to take action to protect the Federal lands until Congress can make the decisions.

Andrus also devoted major portions of his talk to the recent congressional actions affecting the Federal steel shot program and amending the Endangered Species Act.

Just before adjournment, Congress gave individual states the option of going along with or rejecting the Federal program to phase out use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting.

"We know we are needlessly losing waterfowl to lead shot poisoning every year," Andrus said. "Our best estimates run from 1.6 million 2.4 million ducks."

He said that so far almost two dozen states have indicated they will cooperate, but a half dozen states -- including three in critical regions in the Southeast -- have rejected the program.

"We think it is vital," Andrus said. "By complying with the program, you will be helping the sportsmen of your State, not hindering them."

Andrus said that although he was originally skeptical about amendments to the Endangered Species Act, he now believes that the new processes can be made to work, and that the law will continue to protect threatened and endangered wildlife.

Speaking of the complex process by which projects could be allowed to proceed even though they might cause harm to an endangered species, Andrus said: "The important thing to note is that this new process is far from a 'rubber stamp' for development. It is a system of checks and balances."

He said the new process puts additional responsibility on those proposing projects to make early and full consultation with the Department.

"Our overriding concern right now must be for making these new amendments work -- for the sake of the public and for the sake of endangered wildlife," Andrus said.

x x x