

Interior withdraws land

Secretary of the Interior, Cecil Andrus, last week exercised his authority under Section 204e of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to withdraw for three years all lands in Alaska which may have been under consideration for inclusion in d-2 legislation. Andrus' action encompasses the composite boundaries of all the various d-2 proposals, including the Administration's recommendations, H.R. 39, the Senate Committee version of H.R. 39, and some other lands.

This action by Secretary Andrus does not pre-empt the ongoing process of establishing protection for Alaska National Interest Land; which will be completed before current withdrawals expire December 17, nor does it foreclose consideration of the State settlement offer.

Following close of the comment period and finalization of

the draft environmental supplement to the 1974 final environmental impact statement, Secretary Andrus said he and President Jimmy Carter will decide among several authorities for permanent protection including the Antiquities Act and other sections of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

"This action is aimed at protecting the integrity of Alaska lands and is in both the National Interest and the state's interest because it assures that there will be no questionable mining claims or other complications regarding this land until final decisions are made," Andrus said.

The Carter Administration has proposed conservation areas in Alaska totaling 92.5 million acres. Legislation passed by the House of Representatives in May covered 122 million acres including the National Petroleum Reserve. Legislation reported by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, but never acted on by the Senate, covered about 96 million. The draft supplement boundaries are a composite of all three approaches, excluding the petroleum reserve, for a total of 99.6 million acres.

The Secretary noted, also, that the Administration is considering the State's offer of a negotiated settlement of disputes over State land conveyances, but no decision has been made.

Last week State officials offered to "defer" action for one year on a lawsuit challenging the protection process which the Department has put in motion. In return, the State asked the Department to agree not to use Antiquities Act protection for Alaska lands.