

# Explosion of Concern About Environment: Ruckelshaus

"There is an explosion of concern about the environment nationwide."

Speaking to a concerned audience at the University of Alaska's Wood Center, July 18, William D. Ruckelshaus, administrator of the federal Environmental Protection Agency, said his primary reason for visiting Alaska at this time was "to educate myself to the unique

problems that exist here."

Ruckelshaus was in Fairbanks for the dedication of the University's new Water Laboratory and also to fly over the proposed pipeline route to Prudhoe Bay. His address at Wood Center was sponsored by the Farthest North Press Club and the Alaska Conservation Society.

"Alaska," he said, "has an opportunity that is unparalleled in the rest of the country. You are in the beginning stages of development." Ruckelshaus saw Alaska as a place that has a chance for "orderly development which takes into account environmental processes, as was not done in the rest of the country."

Ruckelshaus drew a parallel between Alaska and the developing countries of the world. Earlier this year, these countries spoke out at the International Environmental Conference held in Sweden.

They expressed the feeling said Ruckelshaus that "the environmental system was a mechanism to keep them from developing. They felt that the environment was important, but that it had to come second."

"This is precisely the wrong kind of approach," he added. "What we would hope is that the developing world would not repeat the mistakes of the developed world. In Alaska we can demonstrate how this could take place."

"It is possible," affirmed Ruckelshaus, "to develop a large area such as Alaska consistent with the protection of environment."

At the same time, he cautioned against viewing the environment "through a very narrow prism. This could create more problems as we rid ourselves of others."

Formed in December of 1970, the Environmental Protection Agency for the first time in American history, was a program designed to coordinate the problems rather treating them as

separate.

"You cannot deal with pesticides, or water pollution, or solid waste, or air pollution without overlapping," he said. "They must be treated as a whole."

Ruckelshaus touched briefly on the problem of establishing credibility in the federal government's desire to deal with the environment.

"In the past, we did set standards, but enforcement was very inconsistent." The EPA has

begun to vigorously enforce these regulations.

"The Environmental Protection Act was a significant and important piece of legislation. Nobody, not even the authors, had any idea of the full impact."

Fully aware of his agency's role in the implementation of the new concepts, Ruckelshaus still felt that the areas of the country where the most progress

is being made are those areas where the local community has decided to do something about the problem.

Concern at the local level with the assistance of both state and federal sources seemed to Ruckelshaus to be the answer to the environmental issues of today.