

Rumor says Watt for Interior

Wyoming attorney James G. Watt, former Interior Department official, a champion for state's rights, and a man who works for an organization which sometimes sues the federal government for excessive regulations, may be appointed as Secretary of Interior.

Watt served from 1969 to 1972 as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior to Walter Hickel. Hickel said Watt is an entirely different guy from outgoing Cecil Andrus in favoring development.

Presently, Watt is head of the Rocky Mountain Legal Foundation, a group heavily backed by Colorado beer magnate Joseph Coors and business group contributors enough to turn environmentalists pale; among them Chevron, Amoco, Marathon, Boise Cascade and Southwest Forest Industries.

Led by Watt, the foundation's 10-member staff of lawyers have taken on a variety of legal battles against government regulation and "waste of taxpayer's dollars," according to the foundation. Most recently, the foundation won a battle challenging the Forest Service's refusal to grant oil and gas leases on land being studied under RARE-II. In October, the Wyoming federal court district ruled that the Forest Service could not refuse to grant oil and gas leases without congressional approval. The case is currently under appeal by the Departments of Agriculture and Interior.

Congressional sources say that Reagan may announce his selection of Watt to head the Interior Department soon. Former Wyoming Senator Clifford Hansen

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was reported earlier as the choice to head the Interior Department, but Hansen reportedly took himself out of contention.

In picking Watt, Reagan would be following tradition of installing a Westerner at the head of the department that

oversees the National Park Service and millions of acres of federal lands in the Western States.

Watt was a former congressional aide, Federal Power Commissioner and Interior Department official and has headed the Mountain States Legal Foundation in Denver for three years.