
Heavy allegations on 'Watt's Wrongs'

The latest strategic salvo in the environmentalists' campaign to force the ouster of Secretary of Interior James Watt is a two-inch-thick compendium cataloging the Secretary's alleged misdeeds. Developed and circulated by the Wilderness Society last week, *The Watt Book* includes a list of "Watt's Wrongs." These are 43 actions or proposed actions that the society claims illustrate how "Watt has begun a campaign to systematically dismantle two decades of environmental progress in the United States" with measures "that run counter to federal law or clearly established public sentiment."

The 45,000-member Wilderness Society is a national conservation group whose primary focus for the past 46 years has been the preservation and management of all federal lands. In a statement accompanying the looseleaf-bound tome the Society's executive director William Turnage says: "It is both incredible and tragic that a Cabinet official can go so astray so quickly that he prompts production of a four-pound book on his actions this early in his tenure." But Watt "will, as he has said, use the budget to achieve his ends and he will modify, weaken or eliminate rules he doesn't like. Furthermore, when he cannot override a law, he will frustrate the objectives of that law by undercutting the enforcement power of agencies he controls."

Similar charges were leveled a week earlier by the National Wildlife Federation as justification for its entry into the war against Watt (SN: 7/25/81, p. 55).

The Watt Book tries to document those assertions with facts—often drawing from Interior Department data, texts and regulations or from Watt's own speeches to make its point. It also contrasts the Wilderness Society's attitude toward federal-land stewardship with Watt's stated positions on the subject. Reprinted news stories, editorials and features have been selected to highlight apparent conflicts between Watt's actions and congressionally mandated responsibilities. Additionally, the book provides background on Watt and laws that the Interior secretary has been accused of abusing or not enforcing. □

Fetal feat: Operating the womb

Sophisticated diagnostic tools and precise intervention techniques are allowing medical science to treat the most delicate of patients—the fetus. Several months ago a fetus with an inherited vitamin deficiency was diagnosed and treated successfully by a University of California at San Francisco team who prescribed large

doses of the vitamin for the pregnant woman (SN: 5/23/81, p. 326). Now Mitchell Golbus, who was involved in that case, and UCSF colleagues Michael Harrison and Roy Filly report successful surgery to correct a life-threatening urethral blockage in a fetus. A description of the operation is in press with the *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY*.

When Filly, a radiologist and prenatal diagnostician, performed a routine ultrasound examination of a woman pregnant with twins, he found that the male fetus had a blocked urethra. Of four infants Filly and colleagues had previously seen with the condition, three had died shortly after birth. The blockage can lead to a potentially fatal backup of urine into the bladder and kidneys.

With the permission of the parents, the physicians operated to temporarily correct the urethral blockage. Using ultrasound equipment to monitor the movement of the fetus, they inserted a catheter through the woman's abdomen into the bladder of the fetus. The first attempt failed because the catheter did not stay in place, but two weeks later a differently shaped catheter did hold. It stayed in place, drawing urine, until the twins were born on May 10. The doctors plan to correct the blockage permanently before the child is one year old and predict that there will be no long-term adverse effects.

Although the UCSF researchers are calling the procedure a first, similar operations have been performed before. For several years Rh incompatibility disease has been treated by transfusing small amounts of red blood cells into the abdominal cavities of fetuses carried by unvaccinated women. And, more recently, excess fluid has been drained from the chest and abdomen of a fetus by John C. Hobbins of Yale University and from fetal brains by doctors at Boston's Peter Bent Brigham Hospital and at the University of Colorado. □

Stiff joints clue to diabetic problems

A way to predict which patients with juvenile diabetes are most at risk of developing blood vessel damage with resulting blindness or kidney failure has been found by Janet H. Silverstein and colleagues at the University of Florida College of Medicine in Gainesville. As they report in the July 24 *NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE*, the indicator is stiff joints.

Silverstein and her co-workers studied 309 juvenile diabetics aged one to 28 years old and found that 92 of them (30 percent) had stiff finger joints. The investigators also calculated that if juvenile diabetics have stiff joints they face an 83 percent risk of damage to their blood vessels after 16 years of having diabetes, whereas if they do not have stiff joints the risk of such

blood vessel damage is only 25 percent. And when juvenile diabetics suffer blood vessel damage, it often results in blindness or kidney damage.

Why do stiff joints in juvenile diabetics tend to predict later blood vessel damage? Silverstein and her team do not know. But they suspect that the blood vessel damage *per se* might be due to too little insulin because insulin insufficiency is a major characteristic of juvenile diabetes. In that event, they say, juvenile diabetics with stiff finger joints might possibly avoid later blood vessel damage if they receive increased insulin therapy. □

Peruvian quake prediction modified

Reports that Brian Brady, the U.S. geophysicist who predicted three major earthquakes off the coast of Peru this summer, has formally retracted those predictions stretch the intent of his statement, the scientist told *SCIENCE NEWS*. "All I am saying is that without the occurrence of the first one, the probability of the larger ones occurring is very small," he said.

Brady, of the U.S. Bureau of Mines in Golden, Colo., gained notoriety last October when he predicted the tremors from evidence analyzed according to his complex "inclusion collapse theory." The first quake, measuring from 7.5 to 8.0 on the Kanamori scale, would have occurred around June 28, according to the prediction, and would have been followed by two larger quakes in August and September. The National Earthquake Prediction Evaluation Council discounted evidence for the forecast as "speculative and vague" (SN: 2/14/81, p. 100), but Peruvian officials took the prediction of the U.S. scientist quite seriously, alerting hospital personnel at the end of June to be prepared for a possible emergency (SN: 7/4/81, p. 5).

While Brady still stands by the tenets of his theory, he says he regrets any panic that publicity of predictions may have triggered in Peruvians.

"It's too bad this thing was hyped up so much in the public media," he said. Brady maintains that he introduced the theory and predictions to Peruvian colleagues in hopes that they would initiate a more detailed local seismic and geophysical network in the seismically active area. Any warning of the public if and when necessary, he said, could then have been considered and issued by Peruvian scientists and officials on the basis of the data an expanded network would provide.

Seismologists familiar with the history of earthquake activity in Peru agree with Brady that such a network is needed, says Jerry Eaton of the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park, Calif., but they disagree with Brady's methods of gaining support for such a program.

"Science is so open that you can't de-