

Recent moves by Watt under scrutiny

When Interior Secretary James G. Watt described a draft bill that would forbid mining and drilling in the nation's wilderness areas until the end of the century, environmentalists responded with guarded exultation. In an unexpected move, the administration seemed to be reversing its intent to encourage development of resource-rich wilderness lands. A day later when an actual draft of the bill was obtained and circulated by environmentalists, their triumph turned to rage. They became convinced that Watt had willfully misled the American people.

In another action that evokes both hope and suspicion among environmentalists, Watt has recommended fewer and more mild changes than expected to the Endangered Species Act, which is up for reauthorization this year by Congress.

The latest round of conflict between the controversial Interior Secretary and those concerned that the nation's wilderness lands are in jeopardy stems from Watt's appearance last week on the NBC news program, "Meet the Press." He described legislation to be proposed by the administration that would impose a moratorium on development of the nearly 80 million acres of wilderness lands. These lands would be made available to industry only if the president and Congress determined an "urgent national need" for the minerals. A trade embargo or other crisis might constitute such a need.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 sets a December 31, 1983 deadline for issuing leases for development of wilderness lands. After that time the wilderness lands would be closed "in perpetuity."

Under the draft bill, environmentalists claim, the lands would be "open in perpetuity," in the year 2000, 16 years after they were supposed to have been closed for good. The effect of such a law would be to repeal the permanent protection afforded wilderness areas under the Wilderness Act currently in effect.

"If this is what they intend to do, it is a total outrage," says Peter Coppelman of the Wilderness Society. "This is a wilderness destruction bill, pure and simple."

The draft legislation also would give the president power currently held by Congress to release from wilderness restrictions the 24 million acres of land being considered by the Bureau of Land Management for designation as wilderness areas. These lands, mostly in western states, are protected under present law from profitable uses such as timber-cutting, mining, and drilling.

Interior spokesman Harmon Kallman maintains that whatever document had been circulated could not possibly be the final bill because at the time the final bill was still incomplete. Kallman said that the December 31, 1983 deadline has increased pressure to develop wilderness lands.

"No one much wanted to extend that deadline, so what this proposal does is put it all on ice until the year 2000, at which time Congress will do whatever it wants to do. No law can bind a future Congress anyhow," he says. Then only the moratorium would expire, he said, not all protections afforded the wilderness system in the year 2000.

Whatever the motives of Secretary Watt, his moves often can be interpreted in several different ways. Followers of Watt's actions, though skeptical, are still relieved by unexpectedly mild changes he proposes to the Endangered Species Act. In letters to Senator John Chafee and Congressman John Breaux, chairmen of the subcommittees handling reauthorization, Watt announced that beyond "streamlining" procedures under one section, "we do not now take a position recommending further legislative change..." Streamlining is not explained, however, and environmentalists fear it could turn out to be a way for agencies to win easier approval for projects jeopardizing endangered species. Breaux made Watt's letter part of the official record before beginning oversight

hearings on February 22.

Neither environmentalists nor Watt's own staff anticipated these recommendations. Most proposals in an "option paper" previously prepared by Interior would have weakened the Act by means such as restricting the Act's protection to vertebrate animals (invertebrates and plants are now covered), and allowing economic considerations to play a greater role in both listing of species and resolving conflicts between endangered species and development projects.

Why the about-face? "I think Watt perceives that his record of strident anti-environmentalism will become an election-year liability," says Michael Bean of the Environmental Defense Fund. It may not be a real reversal, he suggests. Watt asked for a one-year reauthorization rather than the more common three years. "He may want to put off making recommendations until after the elections in November," says Bean. According to the Secretary's Office of Information, however, Watt simply decided that "we would all benefit from another year's experience" before changing the Act. An official administration position incorporating proposals from other federal agencies is expected by early March.

—C. Simon, *L. Tangle*

Blood sugar control for healthy babies

Diabetes and pregnancy were long regarded as incompatible. Insulin-dependent diabetic women had only 1 chance in 5 of giving birth to a healthy child. Many fetuses were lost before birth, and those infants successfully delivered, often by caesarian section, tended to be unusually large and to have a variety of medical problems. Now, however, it is possible to normalize blood glucose levels, and a recent study shows normal maternal glucose levels result in normal pregnancies and healthy infants.

Fifty-three healthy babies of normal weight were born to 52 diabetic women in an intensive care program at the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, Lois Jovanovic, assistant professor of medicine at the center, reported at a press conference on optimal insulin delivery at Rockefeller University in New York last week. In a week-long hospitalization during the eighth week of gestation, the diabetic women learned to monitor their own blood glucose levels and tailor their insulin injections accordingly. During the remainder of the pregnancy each woman measured her blood glucose level at home five to ten times daily and administered to herself three to five injections of insulin each day. This procedure, along with careful diet, allowed both the tailoring of insulin therapy to each woman's lifestyle and an adjustment to the increasing insulin requirement as pregnancy progressed.

Although the home therapy was intensive it was not too difficult for clinic pa-

tients. "Pregnant diabetic women are exquisitely motivated patients," Jovanovic says. Of the 52 women studied, none had graduated high school and half didn't speak English.

Now a much larger study, to include more than 1000 pregnant women, is under way at five medical centers. The new protocol starts diabetic women on home monitoring and individualized insulin therapy before they conceive. Jovanovic says that uncontrolled glucose levels in the early stages of pregnancy when the fetal organs are forming have been associated with congenital malformations. In the new study, some of the women will use insulin pumps.

Jovanovic estimates the cost of home monitoring to be \$1,000 for an entire pregnancy. She contrasts this amount with the \$40,000 cost for the hospitalization and caesarian section likely for a diabetic woman whose blood glucose level is not under careful control and the subsequent intensive care for the infant. Jovanovic says that most women in her study wanted to continue the home monitoring program after the pregnancy because they liked having some control over their diabetes.

Because the initial results of normalizing blood glucose levels in pregnancy have been so dramatic, intensive home monitoring during pregnancy is already becoming an accepted standard in care, Jovanovic says. She predicts that in less than 2 years it will become a uniform practice.

—J. A. Miller