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Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton is in Alaska for an 8-day inspection of areas upon which he soon will make far-reaching decisions.

His itinerary includes visits to the Wrangell Mountains in the southeast; Mount McKinley in central Alaska; the Yukon Flats and Walker Lake areas to the north and west; and the King Sabnon area in Alaska's southwest before returning to the "lower 48."

The chief purpose of his tour will be to obtain more first-hand knowledge on which to base the decisions he must make, under law, by September 18 -- decisions which will affect Alaska's future land-use patterns, natural resource development, and preservation of wild areas.

The Alaska Native C1atms Settlement Act -- signed into law by President Nixon December 18, 1971 requires that the Secretary of the Interior make firm decisions, within nine months after its enactment, on the withdrawal from other uses of up to 80 million acres of Federally-owned land for study purposes for possible additions to national parks, forests, wildlife refuges and wild and scenic rivers.

Initial set-asides were made in mid-March, but final boundaries remain to be fixed in September. After that, the Secretary must advise Congress at six-month intervals of his specific recommendations for use of the withdrawn land areas. Any lands not recommended within two years after December 18, 1971 for designation in one of the "four systems" would become subject to State and Native selection. Congress has five years from the recommendation dates to act before the withdrawals automatically terminate.

Literally hundreds of Interior Department employees and officials, including specialists in dozens of disciplines, are at work this summer on detailed studies for the decisions and the recommendations to be made. They include study teams and work groups from the Department's Bureaus of Land Management, Indian Affairs, Mines, and Outdoor Recreation, and its Geological Survey, National Park Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service. The Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and the Department of Transportation also are doing field studies.

The work includes mapping and surveying; delineating areas of mineral potential, water resources, glaciers and earth tremor, identifying; recreation potential as well as present use by visitors; studying social and economic requirements of Alaska's Natives (Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts); analyzing wildlife and fish resources, historical, ecological and wilderness values, timber and grazing, and any related subjects.

The National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service have multi-discipline study teams collecting resource data to be used in preparation of conceptual master plans and potential environmental impact statements for any areas to be recommended to Congress for preservation. A number of large natural areas are being analyzed for their ecosystems and wildlife patterns, including intensive efforts in geology, biology, sociology, archaeology and economics.