



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Department of the Interior

For Immediate Release: February 19, 1981

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Secretary of the Interior James Watt said today the Department will initiate deep cuts and funding shifts and realign responsibilities among bureaus as part of President Reagan's program for economic recovery. Several major initiatives are being announced today as steps in that program, with other announcements to follow March 10.

Secretary Watt said the Department will focus on protecting the Nation's resource base, making lands and resources accessible to people under a "good neighbor" management policy, shifting recreation funding responsibility to the States, restoring existing national park units, using land transfers as alternatives to costly Federal purchases, and upgrading the Department's general stewardship of lands and programs.

Secretary Watt also said that the President is determined that the Interior Department be a good steward of the natural and historic treasures protected by the National Park Service. The Nation's parks are not now being properly protected for the peoples' use, Watt said, and the Government must learn to manage what it owns before it seeks to acquire more land.

To bring the budget under control and make additional funds available for restoration and improvement of the National Park System, the President proposes to substantially refocus the Department's conservation and preservation programs. This will be accomplished through moratoriums on Federal land purchases and elimination of funding for three major State grant programs and by significantly increasing the resources available for existing National Park Service areas.

Legislation to amend the Land and Water Conservation Fund will be sought to allow monies in the fund to be used for restoration and improvement of the National Park System. In addition, aggressive exchange programs will be initiated to round out the Federal conservation estate.

Secretary Watt pointed out that specifics of the new budget will have to await the setting of internal priorities within established dollar guidelines. Details for the Interior Department will be spelled out in connection with President Reagan's formal budget announcement March 10. Watt said program decisions had been made with respect to:

Federal payments to states, counties and municipalities

The program of "payments in lieu of taxes" abandoned by the previous Administration, will be redesigned and proposed for refunding in the Reagan budget. This program reimburses governments that lose tax revenues because of Federal ownership of land.

The National Park Service, Heritage Conservation Land and Water Conservation Fund

A major infusion of funds--\$105 million--to the NPS is being proposed to help restore and improve existing parks. Park Service programs will focus on effective management of existing facilities and the use of private sector services to make facilities more readily usable by people. The budget will,

however, delete funding for States and municipalities for the purchase of State and urban parks and for historic preservation activities. (Funding will be maintained for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.)

Programs being transferred to the National Park Service include administration of the State portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan and State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation planning, the Urban Park and Recreation Program, Park and Recreation Technical Services, Federal Land Planning, planning for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, the National Trails System, Natural Area Programs, the National Register of Historic Places, National Historic Landmarks, Historic Preservation, Technical Preservation Services, National Architectural and Engineering Record, and Interagency Archeological Services. The HCRS will be terminated as a separate Departmental entity. The Reagan budget will seek no monies for the "State side" of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and only limited funds for "emergency" Federal land acquisition.

The Water and Power Resources Service (Bureau of Reclamation)

The Service will continue to seek out well planned new investments in the Nation's water resource base. All current construction projects will be continued but acceleration of construction schedules and initiation of new projects will await an improved national economic situation. As an economy measure a \$35 million reduction in 1982 construction funding is being proposed which will require some delays in project completion.

An effort will be made, in concert with Western Governors, to find suitable candidates for new reclamation starts, perhaps as early as Fiscal Year 1983.

Bureau of Land Management

Proposed BLM budget cuts for FY 1982 stress management efficiency of existing programs, with emphasis on multiple use of the resource base.

Office of Surface

The Office of Surface Mining will substantially shift its regulatory activities to the States in implementing the congressional intent of State primacy in surface mining control and reclamation activities.

Saline Water research

Desalinization research and development which long ago passed the point of basic research will be terminated.

Fish and Wildlife Service

There will be a new emphasis on coordinating the many agency activities related to habitat preservation and biological services. High priority endangered species programs will be continued. Some operations and maintenance activities on newly acquired and expanded refuges will be deferred so that wildlife-oriented, public-use activities on refuges and fish hatcheries can continue to receive high priority. The FWS program will concentrate on improving management and efficiency at existing facilities.

<https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/opa/online-press-release/interior-secretary-watt-realigns-programs-stresses-management>