Wildlife Group Files Suit on Wilderness Access

The National Wildlife Federation is challenging the Interior Department's system for lifting restrictions on access to wilderness areas and other protected public lands. In a lawsuit filed 15 July in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, NWF charges that wildlife habitats, biological systems, and the natural beauty of lands in 17 states could be irreparably damaged by mining and other forms of development.

Affected by the legal action are 173 million acres that prior to 1976 were protected federal lands. Beginning with the Carter Administration, the government began to strip away this protected status by administrative action. NWF contends the department's actions are illegal because land-use planning and environmental studies were not conducted as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, or the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1977.

Interior officials contend the withdrawals were done in the "ordinary course of business"—that is, as part of routine reviews of wilderness and protected lands. Formal impact statements and land-use planning for individual withdrawals are not necessary, they add.

NWF, however, asserts that canceling land protections, when viewed collectively, can have major impacts in some areas. The effects of the withdrawals are not easily identified, says Norman Dean, NWF's counsel, because Interior handled them in a "piecemeal fashion." The changes in the affected properties' protective status were noted in 700 *Federal Register* notices dating back to January 1981, NWF says, but no opportunity for public comment was provided.

Spot checks, says Dean, indicate that rescinding protections on many of the affected lands will be harmful. The full extent of potential environmental damage, he adds, is not understood. "No private organization has the resources to do that kind of study," he says. "The law intended that Interior go out and determine the value of these systems. Our suit is aimed at making sure this job gets done."

NWF also wants Interior to follow administrative procedures. It contends that withdrawals of protective status on lands in 11 states were subject to presidential and congressional approval. Interior officials do not agree. However, in the wake of negotiations with NWF, which broke off in June, Interior in January began submitting some withdrawals to the Office of Management and Budget for review.

The NWF challenge, which has been under preparation for a year, could have far-reaching effects on metals and coal-mining companies as well as mineral exploration activities. More than 7 million acres "are in imminent danger," says NWF, of mineral development, and another 20 million acres are slated to be opened to mining soon.

NWF has asked the court to reinstate all protective designations until environmental statements and land-use plans are prepared. NWF also is seeking a preliminary injunction to freeze all actions related to these properties, including leasing, mining, land exchanges, and exploration.

"It sounds like a real corker," commented Mary Jane Due, senior counsel for the American Mining Congress, upon learning of the lawsuit. If the court sides with the environmental group, it could be years before minerals companies know whether they have access to the lands.

—MARK CRAWFORD

U.S. Meat Inspection Needs Modernization

The federal meat inspection program is outdated and has not adequately monitored for chemical or bacterial contamination, a recent report by a National Academy of Sciences committee says.*

Since the program was established in 1906, inspectors have depended on sight, smell, and touch to detect gross defects in beef, pork, and poultry. Meats that have passed through the system have been, "for the most part, wholesome," the report says.

Nevertheless, the report contends that the Federal Safety and Inspection Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), has not kept pace with technology as the methods of meat and poultry production have become complex.

The $360-million program needs to improve monitoring for several reasons, says the committee, which was chaired by Robert Wasserman of Cornell University. Meats were linked with more than half the 2600 food-borne outbreaks of gastric illness between 1968 and 1977. In 1981, salmonella contamination alone accounted for about 26 percent of all food-related illness. The committee urged that USDA adopt measures to reduce bacterial contamination of livestock before and after they are slaughtered and that an identification system for animals be established to help authorities identify which methods of farming or meat-packing produce more wholesome meat and to track down sources of tainted meat.

The report also said that USDA's program for monitoring chemical residues has several major deficiencies. The National Residue Program, which was established 15 years ago, monitors for about 100 different compounds, but, according to the report, samples far too few carcasses. This year, for example, USDA plans to test for antibiotics and sulfa drugs in only 270 cows, 300 calves, 600 turkeys, and 600 hogs. The chance that an animal will be tested is "minuscule," the report says. Moreover, information "is not organized into a form that can be analyzed."

Many of the weaknesses in the residue program and the inspection program as a whole stem from bureaucratic constraints, the report notes. USDA is charged with inspection, but the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration set the limits on the residue levels.

The committee suggested that applications of current and evolving technologies can help to automate the old methods of inspection and provide more rapid ways to detect bacteria and chemicals. One suggestion is to use ultrasound to scan carcasses for metal particles, bone fragments, or abscesses. Monoclonal antibodies and other diagnostic products of biotechnology could be used to test for bacteria, and chromatography and spectrophotometry could be useful in detecting chemicals.

*"Meat and Poultry Inspection: The Scientific Basis of the Nation's Program" (National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1985).

Officials at USDA, which requested the Academy study, have been fairly receptive to the report. Program administrator Donald L. Houston said that "we intend to work closely with Congress . . . in our efforts to streamline and modernize the program." John Spaulding, director of the residue evaluation and planning division, said that although the committee had "a lot of good ideas," some of the recommendations seem impractical. Meat changes so many hands and moves so quickly from the farm to the consumer that it makes testing very difficult. "There are plants that kill 1000 hogs an hour and 200 cattle an hour. I don't know if the government could afford that kind of testing."

—MARJORIE SUN

OECD Warns of Technological Nationalism

Paris. Greater international consensus is needed on the extent to which governments should be actively engaged in the promotion of new technologies, according to the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Without such a consensus, it warns, there is likely to be an increase not only in disputes caused by clashes of views (for example, over whether some governments give unfair advantages to their industries in international competition) but also in the retaliatory actions that these clashes can trigger.

In a report entitled "Science and Technology Policy Outlook: 1985," the organization suggests that the development of new technologies is "probably the most active area of science and technology policy in the OECD." However, it says there is a danger that growing "technological nationalism," prompted by a desire to promote these technologies, threatens to substitute competition between countries for competition between companies.

The OECD's comments were made shortly before the French government announced last week, during a meeting in Paris with representatives from 17 other European nations, that it was prepared to contribute 1 billion francs ($110 million) toward efforts to set up a series of collaborative projects in high-technology areas under the umbrella of the Eureka initiative approved by European heads of state during their summit meeting in Milan at the end of last month (*Science*, 12 July, p. 141). West Germany's minister of Research and Technology, Heinz Riesenhuber, also has announced that Germany will contribute a similar sum.

France argues that comparable support from other European governments is essential if they are to remain industrially competitive with Japan and the United States. The OECD report endorses, in principle, efforts to encourage greater collaboration in long-term research and development, particularly during a period when government funding is being cut back in many Western countries.

It argues, however, that the French commitment to strong government intervention and the American efforts to let private industry play the dominant role represent "the policy poles" of the OECD. And it argues that "the extension of government support well beyond R&D can be seen as a substitution of public expenditures for private investment which could lead to counter-measures from other countries and growing trade frictions."

—DAVID DICKSON

Committee Hits DOE on Project Write-offs

The House Appropriations Committee, in its report on the 1986 fiscal year funding bill for energy and water programs, has taken aim at the Department of Energy's (DOE) track record on big facilities.

In particular, the committee cites seven major projects costing a total of $6 billion that have either been canceled or stand uncompleted. "Whatever the reasons, the magnitude of the apparent waste is too great for the committee to overlook," notes the committee in its report on the bill, which the House passed on 16 June. As a result, the committee has directed its staff to examine DOE's major facilities program to identify why projects have not reached completion. DOE also must submit detailed reports on costs and timetables for projects costing $100 million or more.

The committee is apparently concerned about the following defunct or delayed projects: the Gas Centrifuge Enrichment Plant, the Clinch River Breeder Reactor, the Mirror Fusion Test Facility-B, the Isabelle particle accelerator, the Fusion Materials Irradiation Test Facility, the Fuels Materials Examination Facility, and Building 371 at Rocky Flats nuclear weapons center in Colorado. " . . . The case can be made that management decisions have occurred which have resulted in expenditure of nearly $6 billion in the last five years in the construction of just these major facilities . . . ," the committee notes. It has instructed DOE to set up a monitoring process to keep senior DOE management appraised of major projects.

The causes of these projects' problems vary, some being within the control of the department and others tied to congressional decisions. Ironically, the committee report does not recognize that its budgetary actions have delayed completion of projects such as the Mirror Fusion Test Facility and the Fusion Materials Irradiation Test Facility. These funding cuts were backed by the House appropriations subcommittee on energy and water development, which is chaired by Representative Tom Bevill (D–Ala.).

DOE is not alone in being concerned about the committee's report. The American Nuclear Energy Council (ANEC) is upset with language that directs DOE to establish a system for selecting a single advanced reactor concept for civilian power generation.

The committee report suggests that the department use a peer-review system, like that employed to select laser isotope separation technology over centrifuges for uranium enrichment, to make a final recommendation in time for a project to be funded in fiscal year 1987. The committee instructs DOE to submit a report to Congress detailing the required financing to construct the pilot plant by 1992 and to operate it on a commercial utility grid through 1995.

"The industry needs more time to decide what power plant it wants to buid for the future," says ANEC vice president Tom J. Price. A choice between gas-cooled reactors, integral fast reactors, pool-type reactors, and other advanced concepts within the next 12 months is "premature," says Price.—MARK CRAWFORD