

On acquired national forest land, which are mainly in the East and are not involved in these wilderness areas, the Secretary of Agriculture does have a veto power. The Secretary of Agriculture has final say on whether or not there will be oil and gas leasing on the acquired national forest lands.

Senator CHURCH. The third question is as follows: "If all applications for U.S. oil and gas leases with the right of surface entry have been rejected by the administrative agencies, what is the basis of such rejection in the face of the clear directive and the legislative history of the leasing provisions of the Wilderness Act which permit oil and gas leasing until December 31, 1983?"

Mr. CLIFF. Well, the legislative history as we understand it, said that the authorities and the policies that were in effect at the time the act was passed would be continued. At that time, we had a firm policy and it was our practice to recommend against mineral leasing in primitive and wilderness areas.

It is our feeling that the oil resources outside of these areas should be fully exploited before moving into a precious wilderness area.

This is our basic reason. We don't believe that we are violating the intent of the law.

Senator CHURCH. To be certain that I understand your position, you are testifying that, prior to the passage of the Wilderness Act, there existed a discretionary right on the part of the Federal Government to either lease or not to lease, but this differs from other mining laws, where the locator of a mining claim has certain rights by force of law which are not subject to denial by the administrative agencies. You are testifying further that, prior to the enactment of the Wilderness Act, it was the practice of the Forest Service to recommend against the issuance of oil and gas leases in primitive areas, and that you have continued that practice since the passage of the act, and find nothing in the act that would compel the Forest Service to change the practice. Is that your position?

Mr. CLIFF. That is a very good statement of our position, Senator Church.

Senator CHURCH. Now the final question Senator Hayden asks is as follows: "Under the current procedure of the administrative agencies in rejecting oil and gas lease applications, how would it be possible for wilderness areas to be explored for oil and gas possibilities prior to December 31, 1983?"

Mr. CLIFF. Well, I presume that the only way they could be explored is by studying the geological structure in the areas themselves, and in adjacent areas.

The adjoining areas that are not in wilderness could be explored, or the areas within a wilderness could be explored by directional drilling from the outside.

In the case of the Washakie, we had an application from a major oil company involving an area on the eastern end of the Washakie. They wanted to go in and explore for oil in that area, Considering all of the values involved, and the probability of oil's being there, based on Geological Survey reports, we recommended against it.

We might have recommended against it, even if the probabilities of finding oil had been somewhat better. But the Stratified Primitive Area is mainly made up of igneous material, heavy stratas of igneous material, laid down in a horizontal plane. You will recall that the