

Geological Survey and Bureau of Mines did make a survey of this area, and their report is available. The Geological Survey reports, as I understand them, indicated that the sedimentary formations were very deep, and heavily overburdened with the igneous, and that the likelihood of oil and gas in this area is not very good.

Signal Oil Co. feels that it is worth a chance to go in and explore. That is where we differ.

Senator CHURCH. Thank you very much.

Senator Hansen, do you have any questions?

Senator HANSEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to pursue some of the questions that Senator Church has been asking, just a bit further.

You spoke, Dr. Cliff, about the ways in which an oil company could go about making some projections on the possibility that oil might be found within a wilderness area. Let me ask you a hypothetical question.

Let's assume that an oil company did indeed test the area indicated by the letter C on the map. I think one of the oil companies does indeed have some leases in this general area. It may be south of there. I am not certain, but I think it is in that area, and possibly in the cross-hatched area on the map, and they also have some leases, I believe, or at least are interested in the area southeast of section 1, on the other side of the wilderness.

Supposing they were to drill these two areas on either side of the eastern extremity of the proposed Washakie Wilderness Area, and were to develop oil and were to present geologic evidence indicating that this structure, this anacline goes right through the wilderness.

What then would be the position of the Forest Service, in receiving an application for an oil lease in the wilderness area?

Mr. CLIFF. Well, that is a hypothetical question, but first we would ask them to see what they could do in extracting oil underneath there with directional drilling from the outside.

If the evidence indicated that the oil and gas resources were of such overwhelming nature and national importance that they transcended the value of wilderness, we would have to take this into account and consider the facts as presented.

We do have authority to permit the exploitation of oil and gas in a wilderness or primitive area if it is justified under the circumstances. Up to this point, we have not felt that it is justified. I think we would have to take a hard look at all the facts, and the national needs, including wilderness needs, and try to form some judgments. Of course, we would be assisted in this by our colleagues in the Department of Interior, who are the real experts in the oil and gas business.

Senator HANSEN. I understand you, then, to say that you do have the authority to permit exploitation of oil and gas within a wilderness area, but whether or not this would be done would reflect your considered judgment as to the importance of the development of this resource, compared to the damage that would be done other important resources that are preserved and protected by the wilderness designation?

Mr. CLIFF. That is correct.

Senator HANSEN. I have no further questions on that.