

# Conservationists angry at Senate bill

By JACK DESMOND  
Of the Emerald

The U.S. Senate has two days to decide the fate of millions of acres in Alaska before it adjourns Saturday.

But before the Alaska land bill passes the Senate, however, it must survive a possible filibuster by Sen. Mike Gravel, R-Alaska, who feels the bill would "lock up" too much of the state.

Conservationists are equally

unhappy with the Senate version because the bill would create only 75 million acres of wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, and national parks in contrast to the House-passed bill that would protect 124 million acres.

No one is quite sure what will happen in the hectic, closing days of the session.

"As of Thursday morning, there was a 50-50 chance of the bill getting through," said Steve Levy, a spokesperson for the Oregon Friends of Alaska. He said the bill must get a high enough priority to be considered.

Tom Imeson, aide to Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., doubts the bill will be considered.

"It's unlikely it will be taken up by the Senate this year," he said. The real reason is that it will be impossible to get agreement on this bill because it is a simple procedure to object to bills in the Senate."

Bruce Farling, assistant director of the University's Survival Center, agrees with Imeson.

"Current indications are that there is a poor chance the bill will get out before adjournment. But since it's election year, you never know what will happen."

After two months of deliberation, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, of which Hatfield is a member, passed the bill out of committee to the floor last Wednesday by a 17-1 vote. Hatfield voted with the majority.

The Senate committee reduced the amount of protected acreage from the 124 million acres in the House-approved version, to 75 million acres. Wilderness protection was reduced from 65 million acres to 30 million acres.

The major acreage reductions immediately drew fire from conservationists, who felt the committee version was unacceptable.

"We are indignant that the committee has produced such a bad bill," said Levy. "They have weakened the protection for the proposed conservation areas and divided them between many management units. This com-

pletely ignores the original goal of the legislation — to protect complete ecosystems."

Levy is particularly disturbed by Hatfield's action on the bill. He feels Hatfield has been a "major barrier" to passage of a good Alaska bill.

Levy said Hatfield led a fight to remove Quartz Hill from the proposed Misty Fjords wilderness area in southeast Alaska. Quartz Hill contains molybdenum, a strengthening material for steel and chrome, in amounts that mining companies would like to develop.

Levy claimed that if the area is developed, it would be the largest open pit mine in the world. Although Hatfield has said he is concerned about the salmon fisheries, the effects on salmon habitat would be highly destructive, Levy added.

Imeson disagrees and claims Hatfield merely offered an amendment that suggested Quartz Hill be studied for its mineral potential. He pointed out, however, that the Energy Committee voted down Hatfield's amendment.

Levy said public reaction to the bill has been tremendous.

"An awful lot of momentum throughout the country has been built up for protection of Alaska," he said. "Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) received 20,000 mailgrams, telegrams and letters last week, while Sen. Jacob Javits (R-NY) received 6,000."

Imeson said Hatfield has received a large number of letters generally supporting the stronger House-passed bill.

Although Levy would like to see the Alaska bill approved this year, he is more concerned that a strong, protective bill be adopted. He said the House-passed bill is the "absolute bottom line that conservationists would accept."

If the bill cannot pass through this session, Levy is confident an even stronger bill will be passed next year.

Still, Levy is disturbed by the actions of a few senators.

"In all, this can be considered nothing short of a tragedy for the millions of Americans who have supported and worked for the protection of the magnificent wildlands in Alaska," he said.

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