

OSPIRG blasts final RARE II study

Environmental groups press for wilderness

By CATHERINE SIEGNER
Of the Emerald

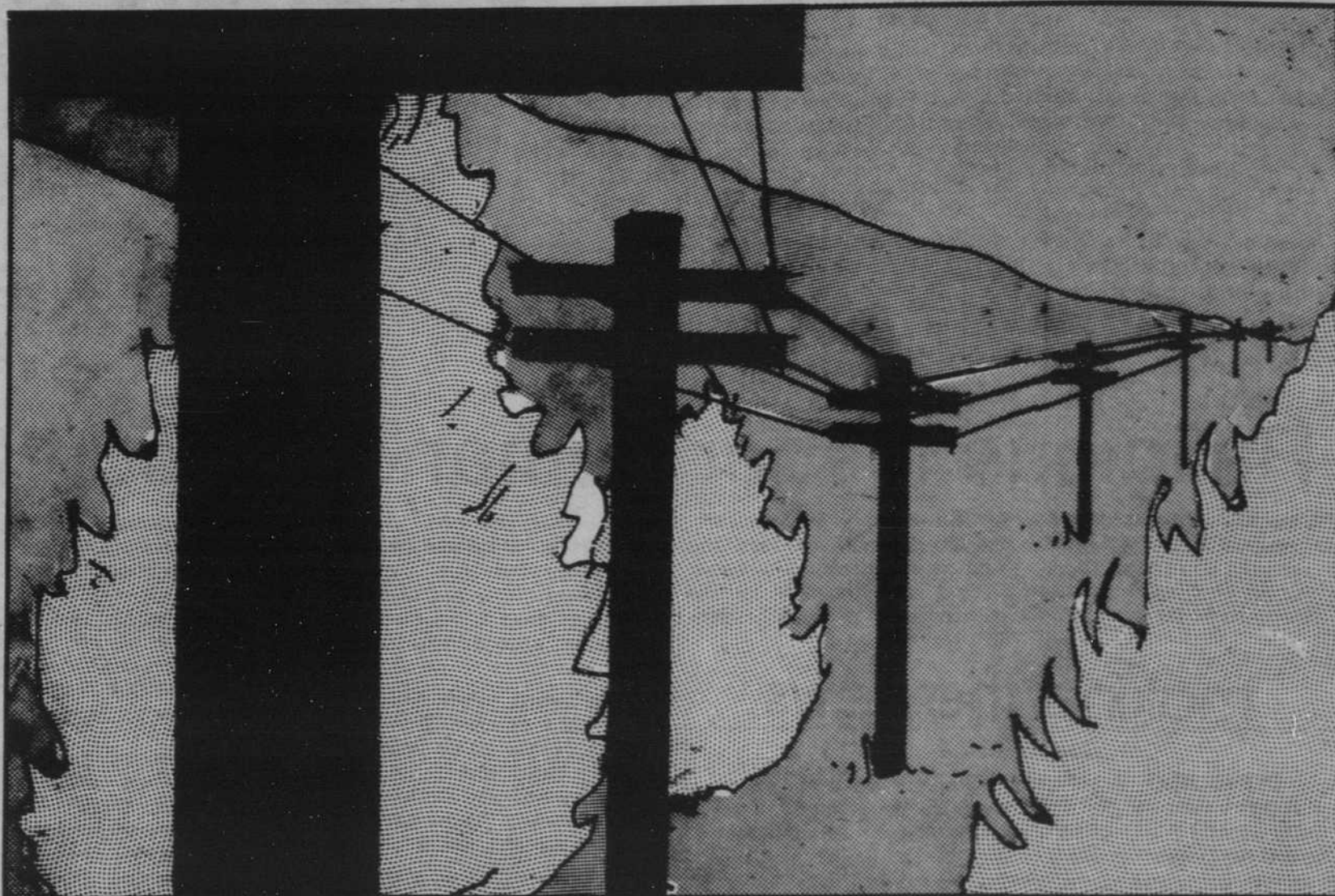
If Congress approves Agriculture Secretary Bob Bergland's recommendation that 15.1 million acres be added to the nation's wilderness system, it will nearly double the amount of formally designated wilderness areas in the United States.

Bergland filed a final environmental impact statement Thursday with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C., affecting 62 million acres of roadless areas across the country.

The secretary's recommendations are the result of an 18-month-long process called RARE II, the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation.

The final EIS designates 11 million acres as "further planning" areas, and 36 million to other multiple-use: timber, mining, recreation, fish and watershed.

Regional Forester Richard Worthington held a press conference in Portland Thursday morning to discuss the Secretary's final recommendations.



Graphic by Tom Ettel

"The Regional Forester explained what Secretary Bergland's filing of the EIS and announce-

ment of his recommendation will mean to the Pacific Northwest," said Kurt Austermann, informa-

tion specialist for the Forest Service.

"For Oregon, Washington, and a part of Northern California where the Rogue River Forest extends, 634,400 acres have been proposed for wilderness status," Austermann said. "Thirty-two areas totalling 660,500 acres will be set aside for further planning, and 230 areas with 4,285,000 acres will go into multiple use."

Austermann said the recommendations for wilderness system additions must go to the president for approval, and will then be sent to Congress with a recommendation from Carter.

"It's conceivable that Congress, with this much area taking away from allowable resource, will look closely at the proposal," Austermann added. "There will be no further public hearings unless some Congressman requests them."

While the public participation process of RARE II was continuing a letter war developed, and pro-wilderness missives were buried 3 to 1 under an avalanche of anti-wilderness letters.

Austermann admitted the multiple use recommendation reflected this fact. "The timber beasts really had their say."

Local environmentalists are upset that only one-eighth of the total roadless areas under consideration were proposed for wil-

derness status.

James Adams, staff attorney for OSPIRG in Portland, has followed the RARE II process since its beginning, and attended Worthington's press conference Thursday.

"OSPIRG's position is that we're shocked at the allocations," Adams said. "People should realize that as of April 15, development may proceed on approximately two-thirds of Oregon's public lands. That includes selling timber, mining, building roads and grazing animals."

Adams said the secretary's recommendations will go into effect 90 days after the 96th Congress convenes on Jan. 15.

"Watershed is a multiple use, and uses such as fish, wildlife and recreation are best served in a wilderness setting," he said. "The regional forester denied that the allocation of 1,827,599 acres for multiple use would adversely affect water quality. He seemed to indicate he doesn't even think it's an issue."

Of the total 2.6 million acres in Oregon assessed under RARE II, 399,901 acres were recommended for further planning, and 372,500 acres were proposed as additions to the state's 1.2 million acres of wilderness.

The further planning designation means the areas will remain undeveloped until resource or project plans are completed for them.

Adams said the agriculture secretary's recommendations for wilderness status were "extremely inadequate," and added that the demand for primitive recreational experiences is rising at a faster rate than the demand for housing.

"Tourism is Oregon's third largest industry," he said. "Georgia-Pacific has pulled its headquarters out of Oregon because their land is already overcut. What's going to happen when these last public roadless areas are cut?"

"We at OSPIRG think it's a pity when wood goes into making toilet tissue while what happens to our last wilderness areas is irreversible."

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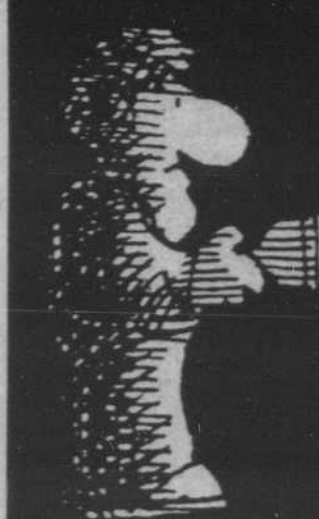
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