

# Vermont Environmental Report

## A STORM IS BREWING:

### How Much Wilderness in Vermont?

A storm is brewing on the Vermont horizon. The subject is wilderness. And the question is how much land, indeed if any further land, ought to be set aside for new wilderness areas in Vermont's federally-owned Green Mountain National Forest.

Today there are two wilderness areas in the Green Mountain National Forest. One is Lye Brook, 14,600 acres, located about four miles southeast of Manchester in Bennington County. The other is Bristol Cliffs, 3,700 acres, located about two miles south of Bristol in Addison County.

In 1977 the U.S. Forest Service began a national evaluation of all roadless and undeveloped areas in the 187-million-acre National Forest System. This evaluation is called the "Roadless Area Review and Evaluation" (RARE II) because it is the second such evaluation to be undertaken in recent years. According to the U.S. Forest Service, the purpose of this review is to determine once and for all which undeveloped forest lands should be given further wilderness consideration and which lands can be designated for multiple use.

In the initial stages of the review last year, the U.S. Forest Service identified only one area of 13,000 acres in the Green Mountain National Forest for wilderness consideration. That determination was contested sharply by wilderness proponents who were able to persuade the U.S. Forest Service to revise its initial determination to include not one, but six areas, containing 55,720 acres of land.

Now proceedings are moving toward a climactic phase. On June 15 the U.S. Forest Service published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This Impact Statement described the alternative uses of the six potential wilderness areas in Vermont and discussed uses ranging from protected wilderness all the way to expanded development.

Between now and October, the public will have the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft Impact Statement. Particularly crucial are a series of five "open house public information meetings" that are being held throughout Vermont during June and July to test public opinion. By no later than January 1979, the U.S. Forest Service will bring together its

final recommendations for wilderness designation for consideration by the Carter Administration and the U.S. Congress.

The question of how much, if any land, should be set aside as new wilderness areas in Vermont's Green Mountain National Forest is producing wide, even heated, disagreement.

On one side is an organization of snowmobilers, loggers and landowners known as the Devil's Den Committee. This group strongly opposes any further wilderness designation in the Green Mountain National Forest. On the other side is a citizens group called the Vermont Wilderness Association dedicated to the goal of preserving "some remnants of wilderness in Vermont."

One member of the Devil's Den Committee who spoke out against any further wilderness designation in Vermont was Roland Q. Seward, Sr., of East Wallingford. Seward is past Republican National Committeeman and the chief executive officer of The Seward Family Hill Country Food Products, makers of dairy foods.

Seward was adamant in his opposition to further wilderness designation both in Vermont and in the nation-at-large.

"I think we are on a collision course," said Seward about the efforts by pro-wilderness people to set aside more areas for wilderness.

"We say there is more than enough already," Seward said. Looking at the current objective of pro-wilderness people to set aside at least 55,720 acres of additional wilderness in Vermont, Seward said, "You are talking about 28 percent of the federal forest land in Vermont."

Seward objects to the prohibitions that take effect on wilderness lands: no cutting of timber, no development, no mechanized vehicles. Seward sees the pro-wilderness crowd as a small band of elitists who want their own special preserves for the rarified pleasures of backpacking, hiking and nature appreciation. He is outraged at the thought that the local Vermonter would be denied access onto these acres of federal land to gather fuelwood, or to cut timber. "To deny people the right to cut that wood, - only a hog would want to stop