

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 22, 1974

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(Cleveland, Ohio)

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

I am withholding my approval from H.R. 11541, a bill which would amend the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966. I am advised by the Attorney General and I have determined that the absence of my signature from this bill prevents it from becoming law. Without in any way qualifying this determination, I am also returning it without my approval to those designated by Congress to receive messages at this time.

This bill would amend section 4(d) of the Act of October 15, 1966, by adding a new standard in determining the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to allow certain rights-of-way across lands of the National Wildlife Refuge System. This new standard would require the Secretary to review all reasonable alternatives to the use of such area, and then make a determination that the proposed right-of-way use is the most feasible and prudent alternative for such purpose.

If we are to have adequate energy-transmission and communication facilities, we must have rights-of-way on which to locate them. Of course, when such lands have a special status as wildlife refuges or national parks, we must fully protect this status when portions of these areas are sought for use as rights-of-way.

However, I believe that such protection is properly provided under existing law which requires environmental impact review and further requires the Secretary of the Interior to determine that granting a right-of-way across a national wildlife refuge or national park must be compatible with the purposes for which the park or refuge had been established. Only last year, Congress enacted legislation which had the effect of reiterating this protection in the case of refuges.

In short, our wildlife refuges are properly protected by existing law. We should avoid changes in the law that could create further obstacles and delays in the construction of vitally needed facilities, particularly those facilities designed to help meet urgent energy needs.

Accordingly, I am withholding my approval from H.R. 11541.

GERALD R. FORD

THE WHITE HOUSE,
October 22, 1974

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