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By Pat Forgey | JUNEAU EMPIRE

Alaska legislators are preparing to raise concerns about a new federal "wild lands" designation that is raising concerns across the state, and across party lines.

"It seems like once again Alaska is under economic attack by federal bureaucrats," said Rep. Wes Keller, R-Wasilla.

The concerns among legislators are about an order issued by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar that creates a new "wild land" classification and directs the Bureau of Land Management to inventory all its land for wilderness characteristics and include that in their land use planning.

Keller said it made him "fume" when he heard federal officials say Alaska's lands had never been inventoried.

That was exactly the process that went through with the landmark Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, he said. That law was a compromise among multiple parties that decided which land could be developed and what should be protected.

He praised Gov. Sean Parnell's quick response against the Interior action, as well as Sen. John Coghill, R-North Pole, for submission of testimony during a Congressional hearing held during the recent Energy Council meeting in Washington, D.C.

Keller introduced House Joint Resolution 21 to allow the Legislature to voice its opposition as well.

It calls on Salazar to withdraw the order and was heard before the House Resources Committee Monday.

The Department of the Interior, headed by Salazar, included the vast areas of Alaska controlled by the Bureau of Land Management, including the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

Rep. Cathy Muoz, R-Juneau, a member of the committee, said she was concerned about federal agency overreaching as well.

"The action of the BLM potentially circumvents Congressional authority and that's of great concern to the state of Alaska," she said.

That could prevent Alaska from developing some of its most promising resources, she said.

"There's concerns around the NPR-A, potential oil and gas development as well as mining, all of which pose concerns for Alaska," she said.

Rep. Berta Gardner, D-Anchorage, said the concerns were widespread, and she sought justification for the new wild land designation while at the Energy Council.

"They couldn't articulate any benefit whatsoever to the state," she said.

Keller said it was likely the inventory would be used to designate even more lands as "wilderness," an even more restrictive designation.

"There's a lot of wilderness areas in Alaska and we don't want to expand it," he said.

- Contact reporter Pat Forgey at 586-4816 or patrick.forgey@juneauempire.com.

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