

state

Watt raps suit on Matagorda

United Press International
DALLAS — Interior Secretary James Watt Monday charged the Sierra Club with suing the federal government, over the transfer of Matagorda Island to state control, merely to boost its fund raising efforts.

The Sierra Club and the Defenders of Wildlife filed a lawsuit Dec. 23 to block an agreement transferring management of part of the 35-mile-long island from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

"They sued us for fundraising purposes," Watt said at a news conference at Union Station. "We get these lawsuits so they can say, 'Jim Watt is trying to destroy Matagorda. Stop him.'"

Matagorda Island is one of

the last undeveloped barrier islands on the Gulf Coast of Texas and serves as a refuge for endangered species like the whooping crane, peregrine falcon and loggerhead sea turtle.

Texas representative of the Sierra Club, Brandt Mannchen, said fund raising was not the primary purpose of filing the suit, though the club may use the controversy to raise funds.

"We sued simply because we felt that the action was in violation of federal laws," Mannchen said. So far the club has raised only \$1,000 for the Matagorda suit.

He also said the club is concerned that the transfer could result in more recreational development and set a precedent that could weaken the federal wildlife refuge system elsewhere.

Oil prices affect Texas budget

Revenue estimates dropped again

United Press International
AUSTIN — State Comptroller Bob Bullock, who in January said state revenues would fall \$1.5 billion short of expected levels, announced Tuesday that sagging oil prices have forced him to trim another \$867 million from his revenue estimate for the coming biennium.

Bullock must certify what funds the Legislature has to spend according to the state Constitution. He said that he was forced to make the second cut because of falling world oil prices and sluggish tax receipts.

"We're cutting back what we expect to receive, but we've still got the biggest cash surplus in the country and the Legislature still has 17.8 percent more money than the last time they wrote a state budget," Bullock said.

According to Bullock's revised estimate, lawmakers will have \$22.9 billion in major fund revenues available for the budget, a 3.8 percent reduction

from the estimate he gave in January.

Lower oil prices alone, Bullock said, forced \$318.9 million of the recent cut and slumping sales tax receipts accounted for another \$334.9 million.

According to Bullock, the state loses \$40 million dollars in revenue every time the price of a barrel of oil drops by \$1. His previous estimates were based on an expected oil price of \$29.60 this year and a rise to \$31.85 in 1984 and \$33.81 in 1985.

Because of the worldwide drop in oil prices, Bullock said, he has revised those estimate to \$28.24 a barrel in 1984 and \$29.61 in 1985.

"If the price falls below those levels and stays there, we will revise this estimate again," Bullock said.

Mark White also commented on the revenue cut.

"It will be a significant reduction, but it is one which I think we can live with," he said. "We've

anticipated most of this. It will require some adjustments in order to make the ends meet."

White, who promised no new taxes during his campaign, said balancing the budget is going to

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be difficult to do without new taxes. The governor is scheduled to give his budget address to lawmakers today.

"Our budget will probably have to reflect some budgetary decreases," he said. "At the same time, I'm not prepared to come out for a tax increase."

Meanwhile, the chairman of the House committee that would have to approve any new tax bills said he does not believe a tax increase is needed.

"It's not necessary," Rep. Bill Presnal, D-Bryan, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee told UPI. "It's not necessary to maintain government at its current level."

Presnal said that the reduction in revenue will mean that the Legislature is going to have to cut the budget a lot.

House Speaker Gib Lewis, who opposes new taxes, said the new revenue estimates didn't come as any particular surprise.

"They say forewarned is forearmed and I still feel a state budget which falls within the revenues available can be written and passed by this session of the Legislature," he said.

Sen. Grant Jones, chairman of the Senate Committee, said the cuts larger than he expected.

"I expected some, but not the magnitude one," he said. "It makes for an increase in the obvious."

Jones has advocated increase this year, but any revenue-raising must originate in the Legislature. Asked if Bullock's latest might sway some lawmakers to support a tax, he said he hoped so.

Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby, Bullock's projection will be the Legislature's budget task even tougher.

Hobby has scheduled a special meeting of the Legislature for Thursday to discuss the financial crunch. Bullock presented his estimates and alternatives to lawmakers.

Public worker union to rally

United Press International
AUSTIN — Upset over the prospect of a pay freeze, a public employees union Tuesday called for a rally of state workers at the Texas Capitol on April 21.

Dwight Lusk, president of the Texas State Employees Union, said a wage freeze imposed on the roughly 170,000 state workers would be "penny wise and dollar foolish."

"This proposal will not only accelerate the rate of state employee turnover, but also will decrease productivity, lower morale and deteriorate vital public services," he said.

Lusk said delegations from Rusk, Lufkin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Lubbock, Houston, Canton, San Angelo, Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Waco and the Rio Grande Valley already have signed up for the trip to Austin.

"We hope that by meeting face to face with state employees, legislators will understand that there's no fat in our salaries to be cut," he said. "Most state employees are barely earning enough to get by."

The Texas Public Employees Association has said it wants pay hikes during the next two years totaling about 24 percent. The Legislative Budget Board has recommended increases of only 12 percent for the biennium.

Association director Gary Hughes said the LBB recommendation must be considered as the bottom line for state workers.

"State workers have a place of importance on the Legislature's priority list," he said. "And their concerns, mostly, even in lean years, are fairly considered."

Employees decry care of battleship

United Press International
AUSTIN — The Battleship Texas Commission wasted money on a ski boat and a German Shepherd puppy instead of taking proper care of the badly deteriorating tourist attraction berthed in the Houston Ship Channel, ship employees told a House committee Monday.

After hearing an hour of testimony from ship workers who decried the alleged poor management of the battleship, members of the Environmental Affairs Committee unanimously approved a bill to abolish the commission that now administers the ship and place the shrine's operation under the State Parks and Wildlife Department.

Workers on the ship, which has been berthed in the channel since 1948, told the committee of alleged health and safety hazards, poor maintenance and improper expenditures of state funds by the Battleship Texas Commission.

"We need an administration that knows what it's doing and will care about the ship and employees," said Eleanor Green, a three-year battleship employee.

"Under parks and wildlife, the money we make would be spent wisely and on things the ship needs instead of frivolous things."

The bill now goes to the House floor for action.

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