

Plan transfers EROS to private industry

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Government negotiators hope to have an agreement in place by the end of the month to transfer the nation's Landsat satellite program to Earth Observation Satellite Co., a company formed by RCA Corp. and Hughes Aircraft Co.

The current proposal has the support of officials at EROS Data Center near Sioux Falls, which processes data from the Landsat satellites. Though EROS' role in Landsat operations would be diminished, there are other provisions that would assure a strong future for the center, EROS spokesman Raymond A. Byrnes said.

However, Sen. Larry Pressler, R-S.D., believes the proposal's terms are too lenient and government subsidies are too great. His aide, Kevin Schieffer, said the senator will oppose the plan as now outlined.

Dr. William P. Bishop, a deputy assistant administrator for satellites for the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is a member of the negotiating committee. He was in Sioux Falls Tuesday for the Ninth William T. Pecora Memorial Remote Sensing Symposium at the Howard Johnson Conference Center and outlined the

200 researchers attend symposium

From staff reports

More than 200 scientists and researchers from throughout the world are in Sioux Falls this week for a symposium on remote sensing and data applications.

The Ninth William T. Pecora Memorial Remote Sensing Symposium, hosted by EROS Data Center, runs through Thursday at the Howard Johnson Convention Center. Participants from the leading private, government and university sectors will display and present the latest research developments in the field.

EROS spokesman Raymond A. Byrnes said the symposium will investigate the future of remote sensing — the collection of information about the earth's surface by airplane or satellite — and discuss uses for remote sensing data.

developments in transferring the satellite system over to the private sector.

Bishop said now is the turning point for the Landsat program, which gathers information about the earth's surface through satellite. The data are used heavily for agricultural and natural resources purposes. For instance, crop yields can be projected and oil and natural gas fields identified using Landsat data.

Landsat is losing its technological edge; commercialization would help to maintain it, he said. Earth Observation Satellite Co. — Eosat for short — would launch a new generation Landsat satellite in 1986 and establish

a new data processing center if the current proposal is OK'd.

If Congress blocks the Eosat deal, Landsat will die, Bishop predicted. It will lose its technological lead over a French system, which is expected to be launched in the next year, he said.

To recapture the lead would be more costly than the present transfer plan, Bishop said, and he doubts that either the administration or Congress would be willing pay that cost.

Congress has set a \$250 million cap on additional money to finance the transfer to the private sector, Schieffer said. Bishop said that's the

bare bones necessary to get the job done.

The current deal with Landsat is too sweet for Sen. Pressler, though. Schieffer said Pressler disagrees with a guaranteed rate of return for Eosat and provisions that the company can abandon the project if it doesn't meet revenue projections.

"It's virtually a no-risk deal," said Schieffer, who is Pressler's expert on the EROS/Landsat matter. "If it turned out great, they'd make a killing. If it didn't turn out, they can get out."

Schieffer said Congress won't approve the proposal unless there are changes.

Bishops gave a different reading of Congress. He said he's confident there is support in both houses to fund the transfer to Eosat. He expects that the proposal will be finalized later this month.

Both Schieffer and Bishop said prospects for EROS have brightened in the last year. "It's an institution that will survive," Bishop said of EROS. There is a proposal that the Sioux Falls center, which employs 350, host the federal archive of Landsat data and have an expanded role in the research and development of applications for remote sensing data.