

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
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NAVAJO-HOPI RELOCATION COMMISSION APPOINTED

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Morris Thompson announced today the appointment of a three-member Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation Commission.

The members of the Commission are Hawley Atkinson, Sun City, Arizona; Robert E. Lewis, Zuni, New Mexico; and the Reverend Paul Urbano, Phoenix, Arizona.

Legislation passed December 22, 1974 to bring about a settlement of a long standing land dispute between the Navajo and Hopi Tribes established the Commission and its functions.

The purpose of the Commission is to plan and direct a relocation program for those Navajo or Hopi Indians required to move from their present residence as a result of the settlement of the land dispute.

Atkinson is an economic development consultant, who was special assistant for economic development to Governor Jack Williams of Arizona from 1970-1975. During this time and also from 1968 to 1970 he had special responsibilities as liaison from the State of Arizona to the Four Corners Regional Commission and to the Arizona Indian Tribes. Previously, he had been employed by the Indian Development District of Arizona and the Navajo Tribe.

Lewis was for many years the Chairman of the Zuni Tribal Council and is the immediate Past President of the National Tribal Chairmen's Association. Under his leadership the Zuni Tribe assumed responsibility for the direction of all reservation programs provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Urbano is the rector of the All Saints Episcopal Church in Phoenix. He has held that position since 1952. The Rev. Urbano is the Chairman of the Department of Missions for the Diocese of Arizona and is the founder of the San Pablo School for Boys in Phoenix.

About 1.8 million acres of land in northeast Arizona is involved in the dispute. This land completely surrounds the Hopi Reservation and is itself completely surrounded by the Navajo Reservation. It is commonly referred to as the Navajo-Hopi Joint Use Area.

The land was set aside by Executive Order in 1882 for the Hopis and such other Indians that the Secretary of the Interior will settle thereon. The Navajos, with the approval of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, moved into most of the Joint Use Area in the 1930's and are still there.

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The Supreme Court, however, determined that the two tribes had equal, undivided interests in the land and the legislation mandates a partition of the land and the removal of the members of each tribe to its portion. The partition will require the relocation of members of both tribes, with the possibility of as many as 7,000 individuals having to be relocated.

The legislation to settle the dispute requires the two tribes to seek a negotiated settlement within a limited time. If they fail to achieve this, the matter will then be settled by a court decision.

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