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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT RESTORES TO INDIANS SUBSURFACE INTEREST IN 225,000 ACRES OF ARIZONA LANDS

Responding to tribal requests, the Department of the Interior announced today it is restoring to the San Carlos Apache Indian Tribe ownership of the subsurface interest in approximately 225,000 acres of land in a portion of eastern Arizona known as the "San Carlos Mineral Strip."

Under Secretary James K. Carr approved an order which will make it possible for the tribe to recover the minerals in lands which were ceded to the Federal Government in 1896. The 1896 transfer was made on condition that proceeds from the disposition of the mineral lands be credited to the Indians. Only about 1,760 acres, of the 232,320 acres originally ceded, have been disposed of under mineral land laws.

The restoration order includes minerals under the approximately 12,000 acres of the Coronado National Forest which lie in the "Mineral Strip." Excluded from this restoration are lands held under patent from the United States.

Restoration of the subsurface interest in the 225,000 acres to tribal ownership will take effect only if the tribe adopts a resolution providing protection to the surface of the Coronado National Forest lands, Mr. Carr explained.

The lands in the "Mineral Strip" were originally included in the San Carlos Apache Reservation when it was created by Executive Orders of 1871 and 1872. Since 1932, the area has been withdrawn from all forms of public entry. Recently, great interest has been shown in the copper and other mineral potential of the lands. The Department said restoration to the tribe will allow development of this mineral potential and could add significantly to the economy of Arizona.

The tribe asked for restoration of the entire interest in the lands some years ago and a public hearing on the restoration was held by the Department of the Interior at Globe, Ariz., in February 1960, giving interested parties an opportunity to register their views. On April 2, 1963, the tribe withdrew its previous request and petitioned Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall to restore the subsurface interest to tribal ownership.

Under Secretary Carr said that matters placed in the record have been examined thoroughly and he has been advised by Solicitor Frank J. Barry of the Department that the land can be restored legally to the tribe under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.

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