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UDALL CONGRATULATES WHITE MOUNTAIN APACHES FOR PRIMITIVE AREA ACTION

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall has commended the White Mountain Apache Tribe of Arizona for setting aside 7,400 acres of reservation land around Mount Baldy as a primitive area.

The effect of the tribal resolution is to preserve the Indian-owned lands against timber cutting and vehicular traffic for at least five years.

Affected by the resolution is a block of land in the Mount Baldy region which adjoins another 7,400-acre area in the Apache National Forest, currently under study by the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service for possible inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Formal designation of this national forest tract as a wilderness area can be accomplished only if the Secretary of Agriculture, the President, and Congress take affirmative action.

Secretary Udall noted that the Indian-owned tract includes lands long regarded as sacred by the White Mountain Apache tribe.

"I consider it highly appropriate that the tribe, under the leadership of Chairman Lester Oliver, has acted on its own to preserve its portion of this magnificent region," Udall said. "As an Arizonan and a firm believer in the Wilderness concept, I hope the Government's adjoining lands will meet the necessary tests and become part of the National Wilderness Preservation System created by Congress in 1964."

The Mount Baldy area of the Apache National Forest has been designated as a Primitive Area by the Forest Service since 1932. In this status it has been undeveloped, but its future preservation does not have the full sanction which formal Wilderness designation would give.

The White Mountain Apache primitive area will remain tribally owned and managed.

In its resolution, the tribe specified that the designated Indian-owned primitive area "shall not be subject to any development or timber cutting and vehicular traffic, with the exception of fire control traffic." Tribal game wardens are to enforce the resolution. Another provision of the order states that retention of the area will not otherwise conflict with the management of the Fort Apache Timber Company, a major tribal enterprise which harvests timber on much of the 1.6-million-acre reservation.

The action was recommended by the Fort Apache Reservation Development Committee, a joint tribal-Federal body. A review at the end of five years is provided for.

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