Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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The Department of the Interior has submitted to Congress a proposed bill to provide for disposition of funds appropriated to pay a judgment in favor of the Snake or Paiute Indians of Oregon.

The judgment is for $3,650,000 for the Snake Tract, or Oregon Area, in Docket No. 87 of the Indian Claims Commission. The Commission has divided the total area involved into three tracts. The Snake Tract, consisting of lands in Oregon, Nevada, and California, is the only one for which a final award has been granted.

Under the proposed bill, the Secretary of the Interior would prepare a roll of all Northern Paiute Indians or their descendants who are living on the date of the Act. The bill excludes three groups of Indians: Those who elect to participate in the Malheur Paiute judgment award of December 4, 1959; those who will participate in a judgment awarded to certain Indians of California July 20, 1964; and those whose Indian ancestry is solely derived from four groups specifically excluded from this judgment. These are the Walpapi Paiute, Yahooskin "Snake," Bannock, and Western Mono.

In recommending the bill, however, the Department said there is little basis for assuming that any contemporary Paiute groups in the Snake Tract are exclusively entitled to the award. The same situation exists regarding the other two areas designated in Docket No. 87.

The absence of rolls identifying Paiutes with the respective tracts, the unfamiliarity of present-day Indians with early band designations, and the widespread movement and merging of bands and families complicate efforts to identify modern Paiutes with aboriginal groups, the Department said.

In addition, there are numerous individuals who are not affiliated with any federally recognized groups as they are known today, the Department added.

The proposed measure represents a consolidation of all Northern Paiutes into a single judgment roll and provides that all funds derived from any awards under Docket No. 87 shall be consolidated to the credit of the Northern Paiute Nation. Disposition of these funds would be made in behalf of the Northern Paiute Nation, without regard to geographic areas for which the awards are specifically made.