Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel today announced his opposition to a proposed California-Nevada interstate water compact because it would adversely affect the rights of the Pyramid Lake Indians and threaten destruction of the Lake itself.

In a letter to Robert Mayo, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, Secretary Hickel urged that the Administration oppose the compact as drafted.

He recommended that the Federal Government enter negotiations with the two States as span as possible and work out a new formula.

The interstate compact seeks to allocate the use of water in the Lake Tahoe, Truckee River,Carson River, and Walker River Basins, proposing to divert additional water away from Pyramid Lake and use it for irrigation and other purposes. Pyramid Lake, located about 30 miles north of Reno, is fed by the Truckee River.

Secretary Hickel pointed out that the effect of the compact would be to take away from the Indians their legal right to the waters, except those already decreed for agricultural purposes.

Secretary Hickel said that "utmost consideration be given the future of Pyramid Lake as being the rightful home and fishing grounds of the impoverished Indian tribe and as a highly valuable economic asset to them resulting from recreational development of the area." The tribe is the sale owner of Pyramid Lake and most of its environments.

The Secretary said that the compact would hinder Federal efforts to preserve high, quality, unpolluted water in and near the lake. He called it "a natural resource of unique value to the nation."

"Pyramid Lake is a recreation resource of national significance because of its large area and the recreation, sport fishing, aesthetic, geologic, ecologic, archeologic and historic values it provides," the Secretary said.

"The lake offers greater potential high quality water recreation for large numbers of users than any other lake in Northern Nevada or California."

Secretary Hickel also noted that the compact seeks to limit the Federal Government, both as a sovereign entity and as trustee for the Indians.

He suggested a "less ambitious but worthwhile and attainable" formula which would serve as a framework for recognition of existing uses but would be "flexible enough to accommodate future resolution of remaining conflicting claims."