Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Secretary of the Interior Thomas s. Kleppe has signed a decision on coal leases and options to lease on the Crow Indian reservation which he said he, hoped would result in the discontinuance of a lawsuit filed by the Crow Tribe challenged the validity of the leases.

In his decision, Kleppe directed Shell Oil Company and American Metals Clim s (AMAX) to reduce their leaseholds to 2,560 acres each or clearly demonstrate a need for a waiver of the Department regulation concerning acreage limitations. In the case of Peabody and Gulf Oil, the Secretary decided that the Billings Area Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs, was correct in his decision the terms of their permits did not support a request for leases of more that 2,560 acres.

He also said any larger lease must be negotiated with the Crow Tribe, subject to the approval of the BIA. He also said no final department approval will be forthcoming on any leases until environmental impact statements have been completed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Kleppe said he hoped that, in light of his decision, "the Crow Tribe and the companies involved in this litigation will attempt at once to resolve their differences in a more cooperative forum in order that the development, in which all parties have expressed repeated interest, may proceed in an orderly manner."

The Secretary’s decision was consistent with the June 4, 1974, decision of then-Secretary Morton in acting on a petition submitted by the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and raising similar issues arising from similar circumstances.