Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Interior's Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Forrest J. Gerard has extended the November 28 deadline during which the Crow Tribe was to establish a coal negotiating committee and has directed Bureau of Indian Affairs officials in Montana to continue efforts to help the Crow Tribe to establish a committee that would be supported by the major interest groups of the tribe.

In a memorandum to the Billings Area Director and the Crow Agency Superintendent, Gerard said: "It is encouraging to note that there is under consideration the creation of a negotiating committee through the election of representatives from each of the (reservation) districts." He said that he hoped that this approach might be given consideration at the tribe's next council meeting January 14.

The tribal council, the governing body of the tribe, is made up of all adult members of the tribe.

In supporting the efforts currently underway, Gerard said today that settlement of the problem must come from within the tribe, that he and the BIA must maintain a "position of neutrality, respectful of the tribe's powers of self-government."

There are an estimated 5-7 billion tons of strippable coal on the Crow tribal lands.