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Interior Department Solicitor Leo M. Krulitz announced today that on June 29 the Department made a final recommendation to the Justice Department to bring actions on behalf of three Indian tribes to recover lands in New York State. The Justice Department has agreed to bring the suits. Two claims were first referred to Justice in 1975 and the third was initially referred in 1976.

The proposed suits would be similar to actions now pending on behalf of the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Indians with regard to land claims in the State of Maine. The New York suits would be based on the view that the lands involved were ceded to the State in treaties not authorized or formally participated in by the United States as required by the Indian Non-intercourse Act of 1790. The suits would seek ejectment and damages against those persons claiming an interest in the lands.

The three tribes involved are: the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe with a land claim of about 10,500 acres; the Cayuga Tribe with a land claim of about 62,000 acres; and the Oneida Nation with a claim of about 200,000 acres.

"The position which we are now taking on behalf of the tribes is that, as a matter of law, the United States should pursue their claims," Krulitz said. "However, we realize that the filing of a complaint may have an adverse effect on land transactions in the claimed areas and meetings have been held with the tribes and representatives of New York State to discuss alternatives to litigation."

Krulitz said portions of the claims would be barred if suits aren't filed by Aug. 18. A bill is pending in Congress which would extend the deadline. "Extension of the deadline would provide time to see if some alternative other than litigation can be found to resolve these claims," Krulitz said.

The land claim areas are as follows:

Oneida:

The lands are generally located in Madison and Oneida Counties and border the southeast sector of Oneida Lake. Completely within the area are nine townships (Vernona, Vernon and Augusta Townships in Oneida County; Stockbridge, Oneida, Lennox, Lincoln, Smithfield, and Fenner in Madison County) and seven villages (Oneida Castle, Sherill and Vernon in Vernon Township; Oneida in Oneida Township; Munnsville in Stockbridge Township; and Canastota and Wampsville in Lennox Township). Parts of two townships (Sullivan and Cazenovia) and two villages (Chittenango and Cazenovia) are also within the area.

Cayuga:

The lands are generally a three-mile wide strip surrounding the northern half of Cayuga Lake. The boundary between Cayuga and Seneca Counties dissects the lake so that about half the lands lie in each county. The southeasterly portion of the town of Seneca Falls is within the area.

St. Regis Mohawk:

The lands lie in both Franklin and St. Lawrence Counties. They include the lands immediately on the East of the present eastern boundary of the reservation to the town of Fort Covington. Two square miles are included in the towns of Fort Covington and Massena. The triangular shaped area cutting the overall rectangular shape of the present reservation boundaries is involved, which includes the town of Hogansburg. Also included are the meadow lands along the Grass River and Barnhart and Baxter Islands in the St. Lawrence River.
