



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

**Media Contact:** Office of the Secretary

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Kent Frizzell, Acting Secretary of the Interior, today ordered acceleration of the Central Utah Project and Department action on specific related requests submitted August 13 in a resolution by the Ute Indian Tribe

Frizzell directed:

--award by the Bureau of Reclamation of a \$26.9 million contract for construction of Vat Tunnel--the largest contract awarded to date for the Bonneville Unit of the Central Utah Project;

--expeditious investigation by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Reclamation of the Leland Bench Area as an agricultural development for Indian benefit;

--completion by the Bureau of Reclamation of the planning report for the Ute Indian Unit of the Central Utah Project by December 31, 1978.

The Acting Secretary also forwarded to President Ford the certification of physical, economic and financial feasibility on the Uintah Unit, Central Utah Project, as required by the Colorado River Basin Project Act (P. L. 90-537).

Frizzell said that in addition to the Ute Indian Unit, the Leland Bench and the Uintah Unit actions, all of which are requested in the Tribal resolution, he has directed the Department's Deputy Under Secretary, William Lyons, to report to him within 10 days with recommendations as to how the Department should respond to 10 remaining points raised in the resolution.

The Vat Tunnel is an integral part of the 37-mile Strawberry Aqueduct feature of the Central Utah Project which will develop most of Utah's share of Colorado River water for municipal and industrial purposes along the heavily populated Wasatch Front area of the state, plus providing water for irrigation, recreation, hydro-electric power, and fish and wildlife habitat.

The Vat contract calls for construction of a 7.3-mile circular tunnel to be excavated by machine boring and lined with concrete. The finished borehole will be eight feet, three inches, in diameter.

Contract award will not be made until August 28. Under an agreement among the United States of America, the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, the Central Utah Water Conservancy District, and others, no construction under the contract will commence prior to November 15, because of pending litigation.

The Vat Tunnel contract will be awarded to J. F. Shea Co., Inc., of Walnut Creek, Calif., which submitted the low bid of \$26,992,662 of four offered at Duchesne, Utah, July 17. Second low bid was \$28,825,000, submitted in a joint venture by S&M Constructors, Inc., and Greenfield Construction Co., Inc., of Solon, Ohio; and third was a bid of \$30,493,474 by Peter Kiewit Sons' Co. of Omaha.

The Strawberry Aqueduct collection and storage system will allow, by exchange, the transfer of water to

the Salt Lake City area for domestic and industrial uses. It also will provide supplemental irrigation water for farms in Utah and Juab Counties and ultimately, in other counties of the central portion of the State.

"I have asked Gilbert G. Stamm, Commissioner of Reclamation, and Morris Thompson, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, to place the highest priority on the Leland Bench area," Frizzell said. "This could be a major step forward in bringing benefits of the Central Utah Project to the Ute Indian Tribe, and for that reason, these studies will be expedited."

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