Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: May 26, 1977
Print PDF

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus and Chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Wayne Ducheneaux jointly announced today that the Department of the Interior has agreed to adopt environmental regulations enacted by the tribe to govern mineral development and oil and gas leasing activities on tribal and allotted land within the tribe's reservation in South Dakota.

This will be the first time a tribe's environmental regulations will have been accepted in place of the Department's general regulations. The action parallels recent Interior acceptance of state mining and reclamation standards for mining activities on Federal lands in several western states.

"The agreement with the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe" represents a significant advance in the United States' commitment to self-determination for Indian tribes," Secretary Andrus said.

He added that while the Bureau of Indian Affairs still has ultimate responsibility for insuring adequate protection of the environment in reservation mineral leasing activities, the new agreement allows the tribe to establish the standards to be enforced by the BIA, so long as those standards are no less stringent than existing Federal regulations.

Secretary Andrus and Chairman Ducheneaux noted that the agreement disposes of litigation brought by the tribe to compel compliance with tribal requirements in mining operations on allotted lands within the reservation, allotted lands are not tribally owned through within the reservation jurisdiction.

Under the new agreement, the Tribe will determine in the first instance whether proposed mineral leasing activity subject to BIA regulation complies with applicable tribal environmental standards, The Secretary will accept this tribal determination, providing he does not find it arbitrary and capricious.