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Secretary of the Interior Thomas S. Kleppe and officers of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation today approved an agreement paving the way for the first major conveyance of land to Alaska Natives under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

"This agreement will remove legal obstacles to conveyance of about four million acres of land, about 10 percent of the 40 million acres due to the Alaska Natives under the Act," Secretary Kleppe said. "We expect when the actual conveyance is made, hopefully within a few months, it will constitute the first major conveyance
of land to an Alaskan Native Corporation under the historic legislation which was signed into Law in December 1971."

The agreement was signed by the Secretary and representatives of the Corporation at a ceremony in the Secretary's office today. Among the Corporation officers participating were Joseph Upicksoun, president; Jacob Adams, vice president for lands; Larry Dinneen, executive vice president; and Oliver Leavitt, treasurer.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act provided for a cash settlement totaling $962.5 million, to be paid over a period of years, plus selection by the Natives of about 40 million acres of Federally owned lands in Alaska.

The Arctic Slope Regional Corporation is one of the 12 regional corporations which were established under the Act which stipulated the State was to be divided into 12 geographic regions, each region composed of Native people with a common cultural heritage and common interests.

"Under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, the United States will be making the largest transfer of land to a group of Native Americans in the history of our country," Secretary Kleppe said. "About one-eighth of the State of Alaska
will eventually be turned over to the Alaska Native Corporations under the Act. The creation of Alaska Native Corporations to receive the land is in itself an administrative device unique in the annals of aboriginal land claims."

Secretary Kleppe hailed the signing of the agreement as an important land-mark. "It means that we are making significant progress in resolving the many difficult problems involved in the most far-reaching settlement of Native claims in the history of our own---and I believe---any Nation."

Secretary Kleppe said he expected the Department to have worked out before the end of this month a method which will allow the Department to convey lands to other Alaska Native Corporations despite certain pending litigation.