Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan and Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan today announced approval of a historic agreement in principle to resolve a century-old land dispute between the Navajo and Hopi Indian tribes in Arizona. "For the first time we have an agreement in principle between the two tribes," Lujan said. "We cannot pass up this Once-in-a-century opportunity to settle this bitter dispute." The agreement in principle, approved earlier this week by the Hopi and Navajo tribal councils, was achieved after 17 months of intense negotiations conducted by U.S. Magistrate Harry R. Mccue of San Diego who acted as federal mediator.

"We congratulate Navajo President Petersen Zah, Hopi Chairman Vernon Masayesva, and Judge Mccue for their dedication and determination to reach an agreement," Lujan said. Under the agreement, the Hopi tribe would acquire more than 500,000 acres of federal, state and private land, and would receive $15 million from the federal government.

The land proposed for acquisition to resolve the dispute is within the boundaries of areas traditionally known as the co Bar Ranch, the Hart Ranch and the Espil Ranch, to the north and east of Flagstaff, Arizona. About 200,000 acres are under the Agriculture Department's Forest Service jurisdiction, 8,000 acres are under the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management, 165,000 acres belong to the State of Arizona, and 165,000 acres are privately owned. The private and state lands would be acquired through purchase or exchange.

The 150 Navajo families remaining on land designated as part of the Hopi Reservation under a 1974 law would be allowed to lease current homesites and grazing areas for 75 years. As part of the agreement, the Hopi Tribe will permit members of the Navajo Tribe to continue to live on the Hopi reservation despite prior congressional enactments requiring those Navajos to move. This agreement by ·the Hopi Tribe is based upon Hopi humanitarian concerns for the Navajo who do not wish to move. The land that will be transferred to the Hopi will allow them resources to support their own tribal members in lieu of the resources they are permitting the Navajo to use under this agreement. Tribal lawsuits against the federal government would be dismissed. The next step in the process is expected to be the drafting of legislation that would be required to implement the agreement. Lujan and Madigan said they will insist on provisions in the proposed legislation to protect private property owners who do not wish to sell and to maintain public access to the land for established recreational purposes. "There will be public hearings and ample opportunities during the legislative process for people to express their concerns," Lujan said. "We certainly do not propose solving one long and painful Indian land claims problem by creating an equally painful land claims controversy for others."