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With the touch of a key, the Interior Department's Minerals Management Service (MMS) recently opened a computer information network to states and Indian tribes receiving mineral royalties.

The State and Tribal Support System (STATSS), gives participating States and tribes access to mineral revenue information maintained at MMS's Royalty Management Program accounting center in Lakewood, Colorado. Through government-provided computer terminals, 18 state and tribal offices have been linked to the MMS system since April 30, the date the system was opened.

"With time, perhaps a year, we hope to extend the system to many more participants," said Jerry D. Hill, MMS Associate Director for Royalty Management.

MMS is providing a training program for users of the computer equipment, and will set up a 24-hour hotline that users can call for assistance.

"Brought in under budget and on schedule," Hill said, "this first phase of STATSS should assist us all in our cooperative auditing efforts and improve understanding and communications. The information access should also trigger discovery of additional revenues. It was designed to meet the needs of its users."

The Department of the Interior, through MMS, is responsible for collecting, accounting for, and disbursing revenues from mineral leases on federal and Indian lands. States are entitled to a share of the bonuses, rentals, and royalties collected within their borders. After deduction of windfall profit taxes, states and the Federal Government equally divide the remaining revenues. One exception is Alaska, which receives a 90-percent share. Indians receive 100 percent of the revenues collected from their lands.

While the initial phase of STATSS is limited to information from MMS's principal accounting system, additional functions and information systems will be made available later.

States currently participating in STATSS are Alaska, California, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah, and Wyoming. Participating tribes include Blackfeet, Cheyenne-Arapaho, Fort Peck Tribes, Navajo, Northern Arapahoe, Northern Ute, Shoshone, Southern Ute, and Ute Mountain.