Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Resumption of livestock impoundment by the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the Hopi partitioned lands in northern Arizona should not deter leaders of the Navajo and Hopi Indian tribes from continuing to work toward a negotiated settlement of their differences, Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs John W. Fritz said today.

The Bureau resumed impoundment activities June 12.

"The chairmen of both tribes contacted me and were concerned that the Bureau activities would hamper their on-going attempts to reach agreement," Fritz said.

"I told them the federal government fully supported their talks," he continued. "But in upholding the law and obeying orders of the courts we have no alternative but to continue our range management program, which includes impoundment."

Seven animals were picked up by the BIA's Hopi agency staff June 12-13.

Fritz said both Navajo Chairman Peterson Zah and Hopi Chairman Ivan Sidney had been informed that impoundment activities would resume.

"The two chairmen were concerned that impoundment at this particular time might have been designed to embarrass them politically," Fritz said. "I assured them 10 the strongest possible words that this was not the case."

Several months ago Zah and Sidney announced they had initiated discussions to resolve the Navajo-Hopi situation, including consideration of a possible land exchange.

"The Navajo-Hopi dispute has been around for about a century," Fritz said. "We are happy that, finally, chairmen from the two tribes are sitting down to talk. We are hopeful the discussions will be productive."

Fritz added, "The Bureau of Indian Affairs and the federal government have an obligation to uphold the law and carry out the dictates of the courts. We will continue to meet those obligations."