Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Interior Secretary Cecil D. Andrus announced today that amended interim regulations governing off-reservation treaty fishing rights by Michigan tribes in the waters of Lakes Michigan, Superior, Huron and connecting waters will be published in the Federal Register this week. The regulations will be effective immediately upon publication, Andrus said, and will govern fishing during the 1980 season pending preparation of final regulations. The Secretary said he has asked Michigan Governor William Milliken to join him in calling a conference in Michigan in early May to develop final regulations and enforcement methods that "will protect the Great Lakes fishery resource and establish equilibrium among all those who use it." The interim regulations amend / Interior Department regulations published in November 1979 after a Federal district court ruled that under terms of an 1836 treaty the State of Michigan lacked authority to regulate Indian treaty fishing rights. Both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources were consulted before publication of the regulations. Two days of public hearings on the regulations were held in Michigan last February and the Department received public comment on them through March 3, 1980. Andrus noted that the regulations were still in an interim mode because the extensive discussions among Interior, State and tribal officials failed to produce agreement on necessary conservation measures for the 1980 season. "I am pleased to note that these regulations reflect a strong tribal commitment to conserve the fishing resource in the Great Lakes," Andrus said.

"Certain areas of Lake Michigan will be closed to treaty fishing for any purpose provided that the State of Michigan also closes these areas to fishermen under its jurisdiction. The goal of this action is to allow naturally reproduced lake trout to increase to 50 percent of the adult lake trout population." The regulations also establish a total allowable catch for whitefish and bloater chub in each district and provide for a 30-day reduction, in the interestz3.of conservation, in the number of lake trout--caught during target fishing for other species--that may be retained by tribal fisherman. The limits were recommended by an Ad Hoc Technical Working Group made up of Federal, State and tribal representatives. "The conference I have suggested for May is extremely important to bring together tribal, State and Federal representatives to develop more permanent regulations which would maintain the lower catch limits voluntarily adopted by the tribes, at my suggestion, for the 30-day period," Andrus said. "I have been impressed with the willingness by all concerned to discuss these issues and hope that our common goal of a pr0tected future for all who use the resource will help us reach agreement on these critical issues, "he said. Written comments on the amended interim regulations may be submitted for30 days after publication in the Federal Register. Comments should be send to the Associate Solicitor for Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.