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Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton today announced approval of two Land and Water Conservation Fund grants totaling nearly one-quarter of a million dollars to the Mescalero Apache Tribe of New Mexico for public recreation and campground developments on its Reservation.

"We are delighted to help the Mescalero Apache Tribe share with all Americans the superior hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation opportunities available on its beautiful Reservation Secretary Morton said.

"I commend the Tribal leaders for their foresight -- these projects and their long-range plan for public recreation services that will provide job opportunities and enhance the economy of the Mescalero Apache people 'predates, but is consistent with, the Nixon Administration policy to promote greater self-determination and self-sufficiency for the Nation's Indian people on their Reservations, policies that now are being implemented through new programs in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. "

The campgrounds are some 20 miles apart, on Eagle Lake and Silver Lake, in Otero County, N.M., about 29 miles north of Alamogordo. They are the first Mescalero Apache Tribe applications for Land and Water Conservation Fund assistance, and an integral part of the Tribe's master plan to develop a multi-activity public outdoor recreation complex on about 100,000 acres of the Reservation. Facilities for skiers, and hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities have been available to the public for some time.

The projects are in a picturesque tree-covered mountainous region of the 460,000 acre reservation which is bisected by the Sacramentos, a southern extension of the Rockies and the first major mountain range west of the Appalachians. The nearby towns of Ruidoso and Cloudcroft now serve as a major recreation center for residents of west Texas and southern New Mexico.

G. Douglas Hofe, Jr., Director of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation which administers the Land and Water Conservation Fund program for the Department, commended both the Tribe and the New Mexico State planning department for their effective cooperative efforts in developing the project proposals.

Federal funds for the projects --$116,035 for the Eagle Lake Recreation Area and $112,942 for the Spring Lake area -- are provided from the State of Mexico's Land and Water Conservation Fund apportionments. The Tribe is providing 20 percent of the matching funds required for the Federal grants, and the Economic Development Administration's Four Corners Regional Commission is providing 30 percent.

The total of $457,954, in Federal and matching funds, will be used to develop a 54-unit trailer campground at Eagle Lake and a 45 unit trailer campground at Spring Lake. Picnic areas with grills and, parking areas also will be developed. Support facilities at each area will include underground electric utility lines, water and sewer systems and a trash compactor. Part of the funds will be used to improve “existing access roads.

The campgrounds, which will be screened from view from the nearby lakes, will increase by about 80 percent the availability of trailer camp spaces in the area. The nearby, more primitive, Forest Service campgrounds, are in constant demand, and the few private trailer parks in the vicinity cannot accommodate the increasing numbers of trailer campers. "Eventually Tribal officials hope to build additional campgrounds near other Reservation lakes.

The Mescalero Apache Tribe's "Triad" recreational development program, of which these campgrounds are a part, has been underway for about 11 years. The major elements of the program are: 1) expansion of the Sierra Blanca Ski area on both Tribal and Forest Service lands where the facilities are owned and operated by the Tribe, and now receives about 400,000 visitors a year; 2) development of a 125 room resort hotel at Cienegita Canyon with an 18 hole golf course and 100-acre man-made lake, on which construction is expected to begin this Spring and completion is anticipated in 1973; and 3) a longer-range plan to set aside a large natural area on the Reservation and allow only minimal development.