Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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A new environmental awareness award program for Indian schools and communities was announced today by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Louis R. Bruce. The program is an outgrowth of new emphases upon environment and conservation in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. It is designed to encourage environmental awareness throughout all aspects of daily life in the community.

Local Indian school board members will take part in selecting projects for awards, and will present them in ceremonies concluding the school year, Bruce said. Not only students but any other individuals in the community, as well as classroom groups, community groups, or schools or communities as a whole may qualify for the commendations.

"We hope the awards program will encourage students, teachers, parents and others to learn together," Bruce said. "Indians are often regarded as the Nation's 'first environmentalists,' and we expect the program to help carry this concept forward to meet the complex environmental challenges of today."

He pointed out that the 219 schools operated by the BIA are stressing environmental awareness through language arts, social studies, science and art curricula "in keeping with the National Environmental Policy Act which aims for harmony between man and his environment and an understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation."

Bruce also said: "We believe this approach to environmental awareness encourages a sense of responsibility to tribe, community and country, and will enable more people to have a constructive influence in a.l1 these spheres. Studies of Indian myths, religion, philosophy, ethics indicate a reverence for the natural environment which may be a lesson for the non-Indian."

Cooperating in the environmental education program is Interior's National Park Service.

National parks have set aside outdoor areas for the study of ecology and have provided materials for classroom and outdoor study projects, and is helping to provide materials that demonstrate the interdependence of man and his environment and show how Indian cultural values reinforce the balance between man and nature.

Further information on the awards program will be available through BIA schools, school boards, and tribal organizations.