Media Contact: Office of the Secretary
For Immediate Release: December 8, 1970
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Acting Secretary of the Interior Fred J. Russell today signed an order extending the legal “freeze” on public domain lands in Alaska until midnight on June 30, 1971 -- or sooner, if Native land claims legislation takes effect in the interim.

Secretary Russell said the extension of the two-year-old order beyond its scheduled expiration date of December 31, 1970, is intended to give Congress additional time to complete action on legislation settling the land claims of Alaska's native Aleuts, Eskimos and Indians.

Secretary Russell stressed that the language of the extension order signed today is identical to that of the original order issued in January 1969. In addition to the six-month extension, the only substantive change is that applications for patents (land titles) may be processed to conclusion for home steads, where valid settlement was made prior to December 14, 1968; for native land allotments where occupation was commenced before the same date; and for trade or manufacturing sites, home sites or headquarters sites if the claim was initiated before that date.

The order affects more than 90 percent of the land area of the largest State in the Union. It continues in effect the withdrawal of all unreserved lands. The order also continue the “freeze” on the Federal lands which are subject to selection by the State of Alaska pursuant to the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958 and continues the "freeze" on applications for leases under the Federal Mineral Leasing Act of 1920.

Beginning on the 91st day after expiration of the order, all applications for leases, licenses, permits or land title transfers that were pending when the "freeze" took full effect January 17, 1969, will be given the same status and consideration. As if there had been no intervening period. During those intervening 90 days after this "freeze" order expires, the State of Alaska will have a preferred right to select public lands under the Statehood Act.

The full text of the new order is being sent for immediate publication in the Federal Register.