Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Extinguishment of all past Narragansett Indian claims in the State of Rhode Island was announced by the Interior Department today following publication in the Federal Register of findings by Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus that the State legislature had enacted the necessary enabling legislation.

Under terms of the Rhode Island Indian Claims Settlement Act, the Narragansett Indians will receive 1800 acres of land in Charlestown, Rhode Island, in return for the relinquishment of all their land claims.

The Act, which President Carter signed into law on September 30, 1978, implements a settlement negotiated by the Narragansett Indians, the State of Rhode Island, private landowners and the town council.

"The parties to this settlement are to be congratulated," said Secretary Andrus. "Governor J. Joseph Garrahy, the Narragansett leaders, the Rhode Island General Assembly, the state's congressional delegation, the town council and private landowners can all feel justifiably proud of their work. Through their patience, leadership and commitment, they have achieved something which has so far escaped other affected eastern seaboard states--the out of court settlement of an Indian land claim."

The Indians filed suit in 1975 for 3200 acres of land in Charlestown which it claimed had passed out of tribal ownership in 1880 in violation of the Trade and Intercourse Act of 1790. That law says that conveyances of Indian land are invalid unless approved by the Federal government.

The pending suit clouded title to land in the town, even land not involved in the Narragansett claims. Lengthy negotiations produced an agreement whereby an Indian-controlled corporation would get 900 acres of land from the state and would buy another 900 acres in private ownership with $3.5 million the Federal government would provide. In return, the agreement authorized the extinguishment of all Narragansett claims in Rhode Island.

The Settlement Act required legislation by the Rhode Island General Assembly to set up the corporation and to authorize the transfer of 900 acres of state owned land to the corporation.

Governor J. Joseph Garrahy signed the implementing legislation on May 10