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Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today applauded the decision announced March 21 by the State of Utah and the Ute Indian Tribe to return to the conference table to resolve the dispute which threatens the Central Utah Project.

"Both the State and the Tribe have too much at stake in the Central Utah Project to risk unwarranted delays in the Project at this stage," Secretary Andrus said, "Governor Matheson and the Ute Indian people are to be commended for the step they have taken."

Governor Scott M. Matheson and Ute Tribal Chairwoman Rudy Black jointly announced March 21 that negotiations will resume formally in Salt Lake City on March 28, centering on water, hunting and fishing rights, and other jurisdictional matters. The negotiations will be conducted by the Ad Hoc Legislative Committee, chaired by State Senator Glade M. Sowards.

"All parties have invested much time-and effort in the negotiations on Indian rights and claims and few areas of disagreement remain," Andrus said. "I believe the remaining areas of difference on a mutual consent agreement on Indian water, hunting and fishing, and tax claims can now be resolved by a good faith effort around the conference table.

"We've invested too much in the Project - Indians and non-Indians alike--to risk killing it now on basis of disagreements which are not directly connected Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Forrest J. Gerard joined Secretary

Andrus in wishing the parties success in their negotiations. "By their agreement to renew frank and serious discussions, the State and the Tribe have demonstrated their commitment to finding a lasting solution to their longstanding problems, as well as their far-sighted thinking for the future of all the people of Utah and the Ute Indian Tribe."

The Ute Indian Tribe announced March 9 that, with the breakdown of negotiations, it would seriously consider terminating Ute participation in the Central Utah Project and seeking an immediate halt in funding for the Project.

The complex, multipurpose Central Utah Project First Phase consists of the completed Vernal Unit, the Bonneville and Jensen Units now under construction, and the Uintah and Upalco Units in the advanced planning stage. The Federal investment up to last September 30 was $202. 7 million and the estimated total cost of the authorized units when completed is over $1 billion. The Project for years has been referred to as "the key to development of Utah's resources for the next 100 years." It will provide for the beneficial use of most of Utah's remain undeveloped share of Colorado River water. with the Project itself."