Media Contact: Bureau of Indian Affairs
For Immediate Release: May 2, 1960
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The Department of the Interior today announced its support of legislation that would give the Nez Perce Indian Tribe of Idaho beneficial ownership of about 1,700 acres on the Nez Perce Reservation subject to the right of the United States to use the land for agency, school or administrative purposes.

The Tribe has indicated that it intends to use a substantial portion of the land for the development of an "Indian village" as a tourist attraction.

In a report on S. 2711, a bill that would declare the land to be held in trust by the United States for the Tribe, the Department expressed its support of the tribal development plan and pointed out that the project will provide jobs for some of the older tribal members who are currently unemployable.

After completion of the Indian village, camping grounds and other tourist facilities would be added later. With the completion of the Lewis and Clark Highway, the site will be only three miles from a major intersection of interstate highways and readily accessible to tourists.

The land that would be affected by S. 2711 has been the subject of litigation brought by the Nez Perce Tribe against the United States. Originally the lands were in tribal ownership but the Department contends that they were ceded to the United States under terms of an 1893 agreement. The tribe, on the other hand, has maintained that this particular acreage was exempted from the agreement and has always been in tribal ownership.

In 1955 the Tribe sought an injunction to prevent the Secretary of the Interior from conveying 19 acres of this land to a local school district. The U. S. District Court for the District of Columbia dismissed the complaint on the ground that the suit was in substance one against the United States and that the United States had not consented to be sued. The Court of Appeals affirmed on the same ground but pointed out that the opposing claims of the Tribe and the United States on the merits were "highly debatable." The Tribe's petition for a writ of certiorari was subsequently denied by the Supreme Court.