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The Department of the Interior today announced its support of proposed Federal legislation providing for distribution of a jl1dgment fund totaling nearly $12 million recovered by the Cherokee Indian Tribe of Oklahoma.

The full amount of the judgment awarded to the Tribe by the Indian Claims Commission and appropriated by Congress last September was $14,789,476.15. This amount will be reduced prior to distribution, however, by payment of attorneys' fees and expenses and by offsets to compensate the United States for program expenses. These offsets still have to be determined by the Indian Claims Commission. Thus the net amount available for distribution will be something less than $12,000,000.

The judgment was based on a claim by the Cherokees that they were inadequately compensated for some 8,000,000 acres in Oklahoma known as the "Cherokee Outlet Strip," which they ceded to the United States under terms of an 1891 agreement. The Indian Claims Commission decided that the $1.30 per acre paid for this land was an "unconscionable" amount and that it was worth $3.75 per acre.

Under H.R. 11590, the bill favored by the Department, the remaining balance would be distributed on a per capita basis to the members whose names appeared on the tribal rolls which were closed as of March 4, 1907, and to their heirs and legatees. The heirs or legatees of a deceased enrollee would take only the share of the enrollee. The cost of making the distribution would be reimbursed to the Tribe by the Government out of appropriated funds, in an amount up to but not exceeding $500,000. The Department has recommended that any additional administrative costs incurred be borne by the Tribe.

In its report the Department pointed out that use of the tribal roll closed in 1907 is preferable to the preparation of a new roll which would start with the 1907 roll, add all descendants, and delete all deceased persons.

"The total number of enrollees more than 50 years ago was 41,935," the Department stated further, "and if it were necessary to trace all descendants and verify all deaths the administrative job would be tremendous, By using the 1907 roll and applying the limitations in the bill, the Job will be less difficult, It will still, however, be a task of sizable proportions and may require several months after enactment of the bill before payments to individual beneficiaries can be made."

The Department pointed out that a full per capita share will be something less than $280, and that many shares of heirs and legatees will be so small that they should revert to the Cherokee Tribe, A per capita distribution is being recommended only because of the dispersion of the Cherokee people and the lack of any tribal economic base in which to invest the funds for development purposes,