Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Tozier - Interior 4306
For Immediate Release: August 28, 1962
Print PDF

The Department of the Interior has announced its support of Federal legislation providing for an exchange of lands between the United States and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe of southwestern Colorado in connection with the construction of the Navajo Dam and Reservoir unit of the Colorado River Storage Project.

Some 707.5 acres of Southern Ute tribal land are needed for the reservoir project, the Department explained, and the tribe has expressed a desire to exchange this acreage for public land instead of selling it for cash.

The public lands proposed for exchange already have been selected. They consist of about 2,200 acres on the Archuleta Mesa immediately adjoining the eastern boundary of the reservation.

The proposed exchange, the Department said, would materially reduce trespass problems and include in the reservation a major art of a mesa that forms a natural and integral part of the eastern reservation grazing area. The primary access to the mesa is through the reservation, creating a continuous trespassing problem. Cattlemen, sightseers, hunters, and other unauthorized persons cross Southern Ute land to gain access to public lands on the mesa. Cattle belonging to authorized permittees, who use the public lands for summer pasture, frequently drift onto the reservation lands.

Reduction in these trespass problems is a major consideration in the tribe's desire to acquire the public land. In addition, the tribe can make excellent use of the area as summer range in its cattle grazing program, the Department added.

The bill supported by the Department provides for an exchange of land based on substantially equal values. Under the bill, individuals who have grazing permits, licenses or leases on the public lands which are cancelled because of the exchange would be compensated out of project funds. Owners of range improvements of a permanent nature on the exchanged lands would also be compensated out of project funds.

Following the exchange the tribe would own 2,932 acres out of a total of 4,672 acres on the mesa top~ The balance of the mesa land consists of two private holdings, Colorado school lands, acreage belonging to Jicarilla Apache Tribe, and 960 acres that would remain in public domain.

The bill authorizes the tribe to negotiate with the United States for purchasing the rest of the public acreage in order not to increase the Governments land-management problem.