Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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The Bureau of Indian Affairs is learning that one of the best ways to get work done on reservations and for Indian tribes is to have the Indians do it themselves, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall said today.

Increasingly Indian contractors are getting a growing variety of contracts. These result in more employment for Indians, savings for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and newly developed skills for tribal members, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert L. Bennett reported to the Secretary.

"More and more, the public is hearing of these success stories, Indian style," Bennett said. "'Indian style,' because most of them mean that many Indians can continue to stay on reservations while earning a living comparable to that available in the outside world.

"And for many an Indian, that is success: To live on the land he was born to, while offering his children and his children's children the economic and social self-reliance that can preserve ancient and proud cultures. For others, employment assistance in urban areas opens the way to still another world."

Not long ago, Domingo Montoya, chairman of the All-Indian Pueblo Council at Albuquerque, N.M., signed a $6,752 contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Bureau needed a comprehensive school census of the area. Instead of bringing in BIA employees to do the job, it contracted the work to the Indians themselves. The contract included transportation for the census takers, training of census people, 1,520-man-hours for enumerators to go to 18 pueblos and two Navajo communities, and 625-man-hours for two clerks to assemble the results.

The Indian census enumerators turned up with discrepancies in the old census office figures, and "performed in an efficient and exemplary manner," according to BIA officials. In addition, the council had money in the bank and 39 Indians had been given needed summer employment as well as valuable experience which they could later use in other Bureau assignments.

This is a small but important example of new BIA planning -- a plan designed to more and more put Indians in charge of their own programs.

The Bureau has contracted work to Indians, and encouraged them also to initiate and expand their own programs.

This summer, the Choctaw Tribe of Mississippi contracted to furnish the labor for 25 housing units a $62,000 project. This included carpenters, electricians, metal workers, plumbers, and office help, most of them Indians. In Oregon, the Warm Springs Tribes took over the repair of flood damage under a $170,000 contract -- "a major and outstanding project," according to BIA officials.

These projects, too, became a source of income, experience and renewed confidence to the Indians, instead of letting them stand by while the white man and his know-how moved in to do the Indians' work for them.

These instances reveal the extent and depth to which the heretofore "protected" Indian is gradually taking over the management of his own affairs -- plunging, with only an assist from the Bureau, into new responsibilities, new jobs and new attitudes, Bennett said.

Thousands of Indian people are being put to work, the Bureau is saving money by accepting Indian bids, and thousands more Indians are being trained in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled jobs right on their own reservations.

As a side result, tribal units find themselves forming organizational patterns of command and communication to take immediate advantage of project opportunity openings as they occur. This is important, for many government agencies have funds available to help Indians. These include the Office of Economic Opportunity; Departments of Labor; Health, Education, and Welfare; Agriculture; Housing and Urban Development; and Commerce. The tribes must be ready with the project and method of implementing it.

And there is much to be done. For example reservation roads must be improved to allow for increased tourist travel, better communication, and expanded transport services.

The Phoenix, Ariz., area office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs has contracted with Indian tribes or individuals for $267,000 worth of work since last January, two-thirds of it already completed. There were no Indian tribes within the area office's jurisdiction which had the equipment, so nearby Navajos were called upon for equipment rental, material trucking, and road building.

The Bureau found the Navajos to be highly qualified for these operations.

Indian credit programs are also being expanded and entire tribal units set up to handle the paper work without involving the Bureau. And the Red Lake Chippewas of Minnesota have the added distinction of having established their own credit sources without having to fall back on government support.

Recently, the Zuni Tribe acquired valuable experience in bidding, performing under contract, financing and administering a $7,500 program for a dwarf mistletoe pest control project which was sponsored by the Department of Agriculture. The Zunis organized the Forest Improvement Enterprise and a contract was executed to do the work on 500 acres of infested reservation pine.

The enterprise employed 10 laborers and supervisor, all Zunis. In order to get working capital, the enterprise executed a 90-day loan of $4,000 and paid it back in 22 days. The Indians successfully completed the project in 31 working days, and are now preparing to bid on similar projects.

The timber harvest on Indian lands is estimated to support 8,050 jobs by 1973, yielding $19.8 million annually in stumpage and $40.4 million in wages. Obviously, many Indian tribes have a vested interest in not only good conservation practices, but the training of other Indians for the work involved.

For example, the White Mountain Apache Tribe took on a contract through the Bureau's Branch of Forestry for the personnel necessary to protect 1.5 million acres of forest and range resources. The contract was for $66,000 and provided about JO Indians with summer employment in fire protection, as well as look-out and fire warehouse experience. These Apaches, now well-experienced in firefighting, travel to battle over 250 fires in western states annually.

The Consolidated Ute Agency in Colorado assigned various jobs to Indians during Fiscal 1967, including

re-roofing on buildings, storm damage repairs and floor coverings -- a total of $16,500. On North Carolina's Cherokee Reservation, the tribe handles the school bus contract and the hot lunch program. And at Rosebud, S.D., the Rosebud Sioux Tribe participated in BIA's portion of a $1.9 million housing project by providing equipment, transportation and materials

for prefabrication homes on their own reservation. The tribe's share of the contract, $137,340, provided jobs and new insights into business operations.