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For Immediate Release: September 16, 1967
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An agreement designed to speed the creation of a self-sustaining Alaskan reindeer industry has been signed by the Interior Department's Bureaus of Indian Affairs and Land Management and the State of Alaska, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall announced today.

The agreement, Udall said, sets forth areas of responsibility in "a united effort to improve the economic base for the Native peoples of Alaska by making the reindeer industry a continuing and increasing source of jobs and income."

Under the agreement's terms, all parties will work to encourage the Northwest Alaska Reindeer Herders Association to develop the reindeer industry.

The BIA will be responsible for the promotion and development of the ranching aspects of the program, until Native leadership develops skills to assume this responsibility.

The BLM will be responsible for the management of the habitat and for investigating the potential of new areas for grazing, consistent with the principles of multiple use.

The State of Alaska will assume the responsibility for advice, guidance and promotion of the slaughtering, processing and marketing phases of the industry.

The agreement calls for the establishment of an Alaska Reindeer Industry Advisory Committee of four members, one from each of the signatories plus the Herders Association. The Committee will provide general direction, supervision and leadership in the reindeer improvement program.

At present there are about 42,000 reindeer in 16 private and two government Alaskan herds. Not native to North America, reindeer were introduced to Alaska around the turn of the century. Under almost ideal conditions the herd increased to more than 630,000 by 1932. However, because of a depression caused falling market, over-grazing, inadequate herding, predator increase, losses due to straying off with closely related caribou herds, several severe winters in the late 1930's and the diversion of interest caused by World War II, the total number was reduced to a low of 26,000 in 1950.

All parties to the agreement see potential for an increased reindeer development in expanding demands for red meat protein in this country and the Far East. The Alaskan range land now available for use can support an estimated 500,000 reindeer.