**Media Contact:** Bob Walker 202/208-6416
**For Immediate Release:** April 27, 1993
Print PDF

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt said today that while he is approving a lease between an Indian tribe and a solid waste disposal company that contemplates construction of a landfill on tribal land in southern California, he will take steps to prevent the wholesale targeting of tribal lands across America for waste disposal.

"After careful consideration I have decided to approve the lease that will allow a proposal for a large solid waste facility on the land of the Campo Band of Indians in southern California to proceed," Secretary Babbitt said in a statement. "The Campo's substantial efforts over many years, encouraged by the prior Administration, and my conclusion that the project has almost universal support among tribal members were important factors in my decision."

The Secretary made it clear that it would be a mistake for the waste disposal industry to look upon the decision as encouraging the targeting of Indian lands for dumps for non Indian waste.

"Building large facilities on Indian reservations to handle largely non-Indian-generated waste," Secretary Babbitt said, "elicits a disturbing image of wasting Indian lands." He noted that "the exploitation of potential regulatory loopholes or vacuums may be behind some proposals to site such projects in Indian country."

"In general, I do not believe the Department should be in the business of encouraging proposals to build large waste facilities on Indian reservations primarily to handle non-Indian waste," Secretary Babbitt said. He said that he will approve such projects only when he is convinced that:

-- Tribal members have been fully apprised of the terms, conditions, and risks and have approved them, through their tribal governments or preferably (at least where large facilities are located on small reservations), through a referendum election specifically addressing the issue;

-- A first-class regulatory system (tribal, federal, state, or some combination thereof) has been approved by the Tribe, is in place, and will exercise clear supervisory power over the facility, including long-term monitoring and the ability to bring effective enforcement actions; and

-- The financial terms of these arrangements, including potential long-term liability of the Tribe and the United States from environmental contamination, are protective of tribal and federal interests.

The lease approved today provides for the Campo Band of Mission Indians to lease land on its reservation to Mid-American Waste systems, Inc., for a 600-acre facility for solid waste disposal, recycling and composting. The waste is proposed to be shipped by rail from San Diego about 60 miles away. A copy of secretary Babbit's full statement is attached.