Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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The Interior Department's Bureau of Indian affairs today recommended that the Agriculture Department provide emergency grain to feed cattle on the Tohono O'Odham Reservation in Arizona, where overstocking has brought about emergency conditions requiring a supplemental food supply.

The BIA recommended that the Agriculture Department's Agriculture stabilization and Conservation service (ASCS) provide only the grain necessary to feed the carrying capacity of the reservation. The BIA estimates that the reservation is 158 percent overstocked and has stipulated as part of its approval that the tribe prepare a management plan on how it will reduce livestock.

“Although we are recommending some federal relief, we cannot condone overstocking." said Hazel Elbert, the BIA's acting assistant secretary. "We are forwarding a request to the Agriculture Department for grain to feed the carrying capacity but we also are asking the tribe to develop a plan to ensure this doesn’t happen again.”

The tribe is now grazing about 26,300 head of livestock, while the reservation's capacity is only 10,550. Reports indicate as many as 1,000 head have died of starvation this summer.

The BIA, which is the federal government's branch concerned solely with Indian affairs, merely processes ASCS requests for relief and final approval comes from the Agriculture Department.