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Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay has announced departmental decisions and clarifications on questions recently raised by a number of South Dakota livestock operators about the sale of grazing privileges at, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation for the five-year period beginning next November 1.

Following the advertisement for the sale of the grazing privileges at the Pine Ridge Agency in May and early June, four principal questions were raised with the Department. First, it was charged that the minimum rate of $8.75 per head for cattle yearlong for the first year of the permit period was too high in the face of declining livestock prices. Secondly, some of the stockmen objected to the requirement for payment of a tribal tax of three cents per acre for doing business on the reservation. Thirdly, some objected to the provision that no hay shall be cut on the permitted lands without the written approval of the Indian landowners and the agency superintendent. Fourthly, there was objection to the requirement for the development of stock-water facilities on the permitted lands.

On the question of minimum rate for the first year, the Department has determined that the $8.75 figure is equitable as a basis for the first year's grazing fees and should be maintained. Thereafter, fees will be adjusted annually in accordance with the average price of South Dakota beef as reported by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Department of Agriculture.

In their protests, some of the stockmen had contended that the rate should be $6.25 per head which is the figure established by the Pine Ridge Tribal Council for grazing on the tribal lands of the reservation and recommended by that body for the allotted lands. Under the applicable regulations the Tribal Council has the responsibility for establishing the rates for the tribal land while the Bureau of Indian Affairs is responsible for prescribing the terms and conditions applicable to the allotted lands under grants of authority given to the agency superintendent by the individual Indian owners. Over 90 percent of the grazing area on the Pine Ridge Reservation is allotted land.

After a careful study of the pertinent factors, which included an independent appraisal of grazing values in the area, as well as the recent decline in South Dakota beef prices, the Bureau determined that the $6.25 rate recommended for the allotted lands by the Tribal Council would not be fair to the individual Indian owners and established the rate of $8.75. Subsequently, this rate was also adopted for the tribal lands. At the opening on June 12, it was found that bids on several of the range units where there was competition were considerably higher than this minimum figure.

A subsidiary question raised by some stockmen involved the sliding scale arrangement under which the fees will be adjusted to reflect fluctuations in the market price of South Dakota beef. Their objection was to the minimum rate below which the fees will not be reduced in any event. The department has determined that such a minimum is essential to protect the interests of the Indian landowners.

On the question of the tribal tax, the Department has held that collection of this tax is a responsibility of the Tribe rather than the Bureau and that it should not be included in the stipulations attached to the permits. The Bureau has been instructed to eliminate this requirement from the stipulations.

On the question of hay cutting, the Department has upheld the Bureau's position that the authorizations to issue grazing permits granted by the landowners does not authorize the cutting of hay. Hay cutting permits must, therefore, be obtained from the Indian landowners with the approval of the agency superintendent.

Finally, the Department has determined that the stipulations on stock-water development should be fully clarified for each permittee before the start of the grazing season so that there will be no doubt as to the extent of his obligations. In the event that agreement cannot be reached, the permittee will be allowed to withdraw his bid and his deposit will be refunded. The Bureau has been instructed to take appropriate action on this phase of the stipulation.