Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Full independence from Federal supervision is being extended to an Indian Tribal group in the United States for the first time since 1909 under terms of a proclamation signed by Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay, it, was announced today.

The affiliated Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Polk County, Texas, under terms of the proclamation, will be removed effective July 1, from the scope of all Federal laws specially applicable to Indians.

Acting- Secretary Clarence A. Davis explained that the proclamation was made possible by legislation signed by President Eisenhower last August. Under this legislation trusteeship responsibilities for approximately 3,100 acres of timbered tribal land is transferred to the State of' Texas with the full concurrence of Governor Allan Shivers and the State legislature.

Transfer of the trust responsibility will take place almost exactly 100 years after the State's first official action on behalf of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribes.

The ancestors of the present tribe broke away from the forced migration of the Creeks from their hunting grounds in Alabama and Georgia to Government reservations in what is now Oklahoma 1 and crossed over the border into Mexico to settle on lands that later became part of Texas.

In 1854 and 1855, the newly admitted State bought 1,100 acres in Polk County and had it deeded to the Indians in fee simple in perpetuity. The tribes still own this land. Special relations between the Indians and the Federal Government developed in the late 1920's when the United States bought approximately 3,100 acres adjacent to the Indian-owned land and took title in trust for the Indian group. A quitclaim deed to this Federal trust land accompanied the proclamation.

The significance of the proclamation is highlighted by a recent comment of Secretary McKay on Indian affairs emphasizing his belief that "wardship" or dependence on the Federal Government for protection and special services is fundamentally bad for any group of people.

"I believe deeply," he said, "that we must work toward the time when Indians will be able to manage their own affairs and receive services from the usual State and local sources the same as all other American citizens. I am, however, completely opposed to any wholesale termination of Federal responsibilities in Indian affairs or any mass liquidation of the Indian tribal lands. All of us in this Department who are concerned with Indian affairs are dedicated to the principle of full consultation established by President Eisenhower and to a selective approach based on real consideration for the problems faced by the Indian people."

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Glenn L. Emmons also commented on the Alabama-Coushatta action"

"In this particular case," he said, "the Federal Government is moving out of the picture in less than a year after enactment of the legislation because the State Government is fully willing and prepared to take over the trust responsibilities. Under the other five readjustment laws enacted last year, where the trusteeship is being dissolved and the Indians exe taking on unrestricted membership of their property,

considerably more time is being allowed to work out the manifold problems. The mixed blood people of the Uintah-Ouray Reservation in Utah were given 7 years for completion of the readjustment process; the Menominees of Wisconsin and the Klamaths of Oregon approximately four; the western Oregon Indians and the Paiute Bands of Utah two.

"As I have stated on numerous occasions, you cannot apply the same administrative or legislative yardstick to the nearly 300 Indian tribes throughout the country. That is one of the major reasons why I am opposed to legislative proposals which would attempt to treat these extremely varied tribal groups as if they were all alike. In our program work in the Bureau of Indian Affairs we make a careful evaluation of the progress which each tribe has made along the road to self- sufficiency, the special problems which it still faces, and other similar factors. In some cases, where progress has been good and problems are comparatively unimportant, we may be prepared to recommend that readjustment of relations with the Federal Government take place in the early future. In other situations it may take many years of additional Federal protection and assistance before the tribal membership will be adequately prepared to move forward on its own."

The first steps leading to the proclamation were taken in early 1953 when Indian Bureau representatives conferred with Texas officials and tribal members concerning the tribe's future status. In February of that year the tribe unanimously adopted a resolution "to authorize the great State of Texas to assume full responsibility for the management, protection and conservation of our forest resources by applying to our reservation the policies and practices followed by the State in the management of State forests."

On July 1, the Texas Indians will become the first group to be completely divorced from Federal trusteeship since 1909 when the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribes of Wisconsin received fee patents for all of their land holdings and were classified as full citizens of the United States. The Stockbridge-Munsee group, however, later resumed special relations with the Federal Government by their acceptance of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.

The two areas which the tribes have occupied in Texas have been treated as one reservation and supervised by a superintendent provided by the State. Indian Bureau responsibilities in the State of Texas have been confined to this particular area and have consisted chiefly of the land trusteeship and the contract payments to assist in the education of Indian children.