Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Hans Walker, a Mandan Indian, was named today by Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton to head the new Indian Water Rights Office.

Secretary Morton had previously announced, in a press conference, October 4, that he intended to create the Indian Water Rights Office to direct all aspects of Interior's trusteeship responsibility for protecting-the water rights of American Indians.

He also stated: "The Indian Water Rights Office will report directly to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and the Commissioner will in turn report directly to me in Indian water matters."

Walker, a graduate of the University of North Dakota's Law School, has had broad experience in the highly specialized area of Federal Indian law as well as in tribal government operations. Since 1967, he has been an attorney adviser in Interior's Office of the Solicitor, where he has been in charge of the Jurisdiction and Indian Taxation Unit. Prior to joining the Solicitor's Office, he served as Tribal Operations officer for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Aberdeen (S.D.) and Minneapolis area offices.

Previously, Walker had practiced law as a private attorney, and hadÂ several public service assignments in juvenile work and civil rights. He was born on the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota.

"Mr. Walker is not only my first choice to head this key new Indian Water Rights Office, but is the first choice of Indian Commissioner Louis Bruce and Assistant Secretary Harrison Loesch," Secretary Morton said.

"Moreover," the Secretary added, "Walker was recommended as top choice by the Indian leaders of the National Tribal Chairmen's Association, the National Congress of American Indians, and the National Council on Indian Opportunity."

For the present the Water Rights Office will be composed of five members. Walker, as new Director, is in the process of selecting his Deputy and the three additional staff. Announcement of these appointments will be made in the near future.

Walker stated: "I will select members of my staff to provide representation from engineering and scientific, as well as legal and administrative fields, so that we will be able to develop a comprehensive program toward the protection of Indian water rights."

Functions and responsibilities of the Indian Water Rights Office are as follows:

â¢â¢â¢â¢ To direct appropriate action administratively and through the courts to assert and protect those water rights

â¢ â¢â¢â¢â¢To establish and maintain priorities and plans of action

â¢ â¢â¢â¢â¢ To supervise development of necessary technical data

â¢ â¢â¢â¢â¢ To identify the Indian water rights problems throughout the Nation

â¢ â¢â¢â¢â¢ To act as control center, status center, management center for water rights activities

â¢ â¢â¢â¢â¢ To assign responsibilities to and monitor performance of all elements of the Interior organization for their part in Indian water rights efforts.

The Indian Water Rights Office will be located in the Bureau of Indian Affairs Building, 1951 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20242.

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