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In accordance with their own expressed wishes, about 2,100 Indians of western Oregon are taking over full control of their ow property and will no longer receive special Federal services because of their status as Indians under a proclamation signed this week (August 13) by Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton.

The proclamation was issued in line with a 1954 Congressional law (Public Law 588 of the 83rd Congress) and covers three major Indian groupings: The Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Reservation the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community, and numerous other small bands located in the southwestern corner of the State.

"In a very real sense the Indians of western Oregon are pioneers," Secretary Seaton commented. "They were one of the first Indian groups in the country to request full responsibility for the management of their own affairs. They have given the Bureau of Indian Affairs excellent cooperation in carrying this program through to completion. I personally extend my warmest commendations and best wishes to them on achieving this most important milestone in their lives."

The western Oregon Indians are the second tribal group in the country to reach the stage of divorcement from Federal trusteeship under the so-called "termination laws" enacted by Congress in 1954. On July 1, 1955, trusteeship over the property of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes of Texas was transferred from the Federal Government to the State. The present action, however, is more in the nature or a true termination of trust.

The Federal trust relations which are being brought to an end today are just about 100 years old. In the case of the Siletz Tribes, they date back to an 1855 executive order establishing a "coast reserve" which later became known as the Siletz Reservation. The Grand Ronde Reservation was established by executive order two years later. The southwestern group consists mainly of "mixed blood" people descended from Indians who did not move to one of the two reservations.

Down through the years, and especially in the period after 1938, these Indians took advantage of public schooling provided by the State of Oregon, moved into steady jobs in lumbering and other operations of the area, and substantially improved their living standards.

In reporting to Congress in 1954 on their social and economic status, the Department had this to say:

"Ancient customs still inherent in many Indian tribes of the United States are not readily apparent among the present members of tribes residing on the Oregon coast. In fact, the native language is seldom spoken. The habits of these people are not unlike those of their non-Indian neighbors. The clothes they wear, the pursuits they follow, the desires they express, and their reactions to their environment all attest a degree of acculturation which provides little, if any, evidence to distinguish or identify Indians apart from the person next door.''

The first official discussions about the possibility of terminating Federal trusteeship in western Oregon

were held with the Indians of the area by the Indian Bureau's Portland area office staff in 1948. Three years later, with the approval of the major groups involved, legislation to accomplish this purpose was introduced in the 82nd Congress but not enacted.

In 1953 a new draft of legislation was presented to the Indians and discussed with them over a period of several weeks. In this process it was revised many times and finally submitted to Congress in early 1954. After Congressional hearings at which the Indians were given an opportunity to be heard, it was eventually enacted and approved by the President as Public Law 588 on August 13, 1954. The law provided two years for completion of the termination process.

Under the law the tribal groups were given a choice of four methods for handling the property they own in common: (1) forming a corporation under state law to take over the management, (2) having it transferred to a private trustee of their own choosing, (J) having it parceled out among the individual members, or (4) having it sold and receiving their individual shares of the proceeds.

The Siletz Tribes, with tribal holdings that totaled 2,561 acres, elected to have all the land sold and received proceeds of about $500,000. This was recently distributed among the individual members in shares of $542.50 each.

Of the 597 acres owned by the Grand Ronde tribes, 253 were sold at the request of the tribes, bringing in individual shares of $35 each. The remaining 344 acres have been transferred to Harold Fuller, a Sheridan, Oreg. Attorney, who will act as private trustee.

A 37-acre tract of so-called "administrative reserve" land formerly used by the Indian Bureau on the Siletz Reservation has been transferred, at the Indians' request, to the city of Siletz and will be used as a park. Another tract of about six acres located in Empire, Oreg. has been turned over to that community.

In addition to the tribal holdings, the Indians of western Oregon also owned 8,418 acres in the form of allotments ma.de years ago to individual tribal members. Thirty-nine of these tracts, totaling 2,493 acres, have been turned over to the individual owners in fee simple title. The remaining 5,925 acres of allotted land have been sold at the request of the owners.

The western Oregon law, like other termination laws recently passed by Congress, provided vocational training and adult education at Government expense for Indians desiring such assistance. About a fourth of the adult Indians of western Oregon took advantage of this provision.