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Conservation of timber resources on the Klamath Indian Reservation of south central Oregon is "of primary importance to the economy of the area and to the welfare of the public generally", Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton said today in commenting on S. 2047, a bill that provides for Federal acquisition of all Klamath tribal lands.

In a letter of September 26 to Senator Richard Neuberger, chairman of the Indian Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Mr. Seaton outlined the Interior Department's tentative views on S. 2047 and promised a report and recommendation on it early in the next Congressional session.

The two problems confronting both the Federal Government and the State of Oregon," the Secretary wrote, "are protecting the property rights of the Klamath Indians on the one hand, and providing for the sustained yield management of an important natural resource area on the other. Public ownership would accomplish both of these objectives. If there is any reasonable alternative to public ownership which would accomplish the same results, we believe such an alternative should be thoroughly explored."

In connection with the Indians' property rights, Secretary Seaton called attention to the Klamath Termination Act of 1954. As amended in the most recent Congressional session, this law provides for an end of Federal trusteeship over the Klamath Reservation by August 1960. It also gives individual members of the Tribe the right to withdraw the cash value of their pro rata share of tribal assets (consisting chiefly of the tribal forest) but provides that no sales of tribal timber land to satisfy this requirement shall be made until after the end of the next Congressional session.

"The essence of the 1954 Act," said Mr. Seaton, "is that the Klamath Indians shall be freed of all Federal restraints because of their Indian origin, and ..... placed in the same status as other citizens .... Inasmuch as existing Federal and State laws do not require the owners of large forest resources to maintain them intact and to manage them on a sustained yield basis in the interests of conservation, the Klamath Indians should not be subjected to any such restrictions when the Fe

At the same time, however, the Secretary emphasized that the manner in which the Klamath Forest is managed will have "a vital impact on the life and economy of the entire Klamath River Basin."

"Kept intact through continued management according to principles of sustained yield, "his letter stated, lithe forest will remain a perpetually productive source of ponderosa pine and other commercial species e Such management would also insure continuation of its importance as a watershed. The large numbers of migratory waterfowl for which it now provides nesting and feeding grounds would be protected as would the deer and other species of wild animals that now find sanctuary within its boundaries, Further development of the forest's recreational potential would be made possible."

Referring more specifically to the problems that may arise under the law in its present form, Mr. Seaton had this to say: "lt is doubtful whether sustained yield management would be continued on a very large

portion of the timber area if it is sold without restriction in small economic units. The management specialists, who have responsibility for the sales of these units, are obligated under the law to obtain on behalf of the withdrawing members the greatest possible return from these sales, This obligation means that a sizable portion of the area to be sold would have to be sold in small-sized units in order to obtain the greatest amount of competition possible. It is doubtful that such small units, within themselves, can furnish a sustained cut for even the smallest of sawmills."

The Klamath Tribal Forest comprises approximately 750,000 acres and has been described as one of the finest ponderosa pine stands in the country. The tribal property also includes marshlands which are highly important for waterfowl breeding and feeding p and constitute a key unit in the Pacific Flyway.