Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton today urged enactment of four Congressional bills which would in combination bring an end to Federal trusteeship over the property and affairs of 38 small Indian reservations or “rancherias” in California in line with recommendations made by the Indian owners.

The bills are H. R. 6364 affecting 10 rancherias with a total area of 1,773 acres and a combined population of 225; H.R. 2838 involving five rancherias with 760 acres and 178 people; H.R. 2824 affecting two rancherias with 39 acres and 35 people; and H.R. 2576 involving 11 rancherias with It288 acres and 455 people. The total area involved is about 3,860 acres and the total population approximately 893 Indians.

Legislation that would terminate special Federal responsibilities for all Indian tribes and bands in California, Secretary Seaton pointed out, was introduced and considered but not enacted in both the 82nd and 83rd Congresses. During the past two years the Bureau of Indian Affairs has carried on extensive consultations with selected Indian groups in California concerning the possibilities of terminal legislation. The four bills are the result of these consultations.

All of the bills give the Indians involved an opportunity to prepare a plan for distributing the assets they now hold in common or for selling these assets - and dividing the proceeds. The plan is to be submitted to the vote of the Indians who will participate in the distribution. No provision is made for any further action if a plan is not approved. The bills also contain special provisions to protect Indian water rights and to authorize improvements in roads and in irrigation or domestic water systems that may be needed.

Minor amendments, chiefly of a clarifying nature, have been suggested by the Department in all four bills.