Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: December 4, 1958
Print PDF

Acting Secretary of the Interior Elmer F. Bennett today asked Secretary of Defense Neil F. McElroy to help speed Army payments of money to Indians for land which the Federal Government took for reservoir projects.

The money is owed to three Indian groups in North Dakota and South Dakota. It totals $7,623,888 for 73,500 acres of land taken for two different projects.

One of the tribes involved is the Standing Rock Sioux whose reservation lies partly in South Dakota, partly in North Dakota. Under a law passed last September nearly 56,000 acres of land belonging to the tribe and to individual members was taken by the Government, exclusive of mineral rights, for the Oahe Dam and Reservoir Project. By terms of the law, the tribe and the individual Indian landowners are entitled to a total of $5,251,553. This includes $1,952,040 for the appraised value of the lands actually taken and $3,299,513 in settlement of all claims, rights and demands of the tribe and individuals from the taking. Up to $726,546 of the $3,299,513 will be available to cover the costs of relocating about 175 Indian families who must be moved from the taking area

In addition, Congress has authorized the use of $6,960,000 for general social and economic improvement of the tribe and its members. This money, however, has not yet been appropriated by the Congress. When appropriated it will be provided by the Department of the Interior and is not involved in the request made of the Department of Defense.

The two other tribes concerned are the Crow Creek and Lower Brule Sioux groups of South Dakota. Their lands were taken over three years ago for the Fort Randall Dam and Reservoir Project. However, the rate of compensation was established by Congress just last September.

The Crow Creek group and its members gave up about 9,500 acres and payment was fixed at $1,395,812 in settlement of all claims. Of this amount, almost $400,000 has already been deposited to the credit of the tribe in the United States Treasury and the balance is still due.

In the case of Lower Brule, the taking involved nearly 8,000 acres and the compensation was established at $976,523. The amount still due is $705,912.

In letters to Secretary McElroy, Acting Secretary Bennett pointed out that requests for payment to all three of the tribes were sent to the Corps of Engineers in September and October.

“Since that time," he continued, "we have been informally advised by representatives of the Corps of Engineers that money is not presently available” in funds provided for the two reservoir projects to make the payments to the tribal groups and their individual members.

In order to deal properly with the tribes and the affected individual Indian landowners, Acting Secretary Bennett said, it would seem to be in the best interests of the Government to make a re-analysis of the funds for the purpose of disposing of these obligations “as promptly as possible.”