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The Department of the Interior favors legislation that would reinvest in the Indian tribes of the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming title to the minerals in 161,500 acres previously ceded to the Federal Government, it was announced today.

In a report to Congress Assistant Secretary Roger Ernst recommended enactment of H. R. 11141, a restoration pill, with some technical and clarifying amendments.

The 161,500 acres affected by the bill were ceded to the Government by the Shoshone and Arapahoe Tribes under 1953 legislation in connection with the Riverton Reclamation Project. As agreed upon at that time, the tribes received compensation of $1,009,500 for the surface value of the lands. The minerals were made subject to disposition under the mining and mineral leasing laws of the United States with a provision that the tribes would be paid 90 percent of the gross receipts.

More recently the tribes have expressed dissatisfaction with this arrangement because they feel that competitive leasing for oil and gas development as required by law for Indian tribal lands would yield a greater return than noncompetitive leasing as applicable on the public domain. This feeling is supported, says the Department, by the fact that the Indian Bureau, prior to 1953, executed 12 competitive mineral leases on about 4,910 acres of these lands which produced a combined bonus of $727,310.

Since 1953 approximately 117,473 acres have been leased by the Bureau of Land Management and offers to lease are now pending on an additional 51,889.78 acres. The immediate effect of the bill would be to prevent further action on the pending applications, make all future leases subject to the Tribal Mineral Leasing Act of 1938, and prevent any renewals on the BLM-leased 117,473 acres at the end of the five-year primary term unless oil or gas is being produced in paying quantities at that time.

The Department has recommended modification of the latter provision to authorize extension of existing leases for five years after the date of enactment, regardless of the time remaining in the primary lease term. This recommendation was made because of expenses incurred by the lessees and because drilling operations on these lands were recently suspended by the Department for a 2 ½ year period in connection with pending litigation.

The Department also recommended an amendment to provide that the tribes should pay the cost of leasing the minerals and distributing the proceeds.