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The Department of the Interior today announced its endorsement of H. R. 6128, a bill that will permit members of the Catawba Indian Tribe of South Carolina to divide their tribal assets and discontinue their special Indian relations with the Federal Government.

The Catawba Indians have requested such legislation and have explicitly approved the provisions of H. R. 6128.

The property to be divided consists of 3,388.8 acres of land under Federal trusteeship in York County, S. C., near Rock Hill; a tribal herd of 120 beef cattle; approximately 6,500,000 board feet of timber; and nearly $5,000 of cash on deposit with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The total estimated net worth of Tribe is slightly over $250,000.

Under provisions of the bill, tribal members who have received an assignment or use right in particular tracts of tribal land will be given the right to select these tracts as part of their distributive shares. The remainder of the tribal assets will be sold and the proceeds distributed. Any property not sold within two years after enactment will be conveyed to a trustee for liquidation and distribution.

The Catawba Indians have received services for many years from the State of South Carolina but have only a relatively short history of special relationships with the Federal Government. Under a 1943 agreement among the Tribe, the State, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the land now held in Federal trusteeship was bought for the Tribe by the State and conveyed to the United States in 1945. In addition, the tribe has had for many years a reservation of one square mile which g held in trust by the State. This will not be affected by H. R. 6128 unless the State Legislature takes action to have it included in the distribution plan.

Last fall the Bureau of Indian Affairs found 62 Catawba families living on the Federal trust land, 21 families living on the "old reservation" under the State, 26 families living in Rock Hill, and 53 families living elsewhere. The total includes 614 Indians in 162 family groups.

In its report the Department pointed out that the Catawbas have advanced economically at a steady pace during the past 14 years and have now reached a position comparable to that of their non-Indian neighbors.

Last December the State of South Carolina appointed a five-man legislative committee to help the Catawbas in negotiating for removal of the Federal trust restrictions from their land. This committee has studied H. R. 6128 and endorsed it.