

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

BUREAU OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

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## INTERIOR APPROVES \$228,977 IN FEDERAL GRANTS FOR TWO NEW MEXICO INDIAN RECREATION PROJECTS

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton today announced approval of two Land and Water Conservation Fund grants totalling nearly one-quarter of a million dollars to the Mescalero Apache Tribe of New Mexico for public recreation and campground developments on its Reservation.

"We are delighted to help the Mescalero Apache Tribe share with all Americans the superior hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities available on its beautiful Reservation," Secretary Morton said.

"I commend the Tribal leaders for their foresight -- these projects and their long-range plan for public recreation services that will provide job opportunities and enhance the economy of the Mescalero Apache people predates, but is consistent with, the Nixon Administration policy to promote greater self-determination and self-sufficiency for the Nation's Indian people on their Reservations, policies that now are being implemented through new programs in the Bureau of Indian Affairs."

The campgrounds are some 20 miles apart, on Eagle Lake and Silver Lake, in Otero County, N.M., about 29 miles north of Alamogordo. They are the first Mescalero Apache Tribe applications for Land and Water Conservation Fund assistance, and an integral part of the Tribe's master plan to develop a multi-activity public outdoor recreation complex on about 100,000 acres of the Reservation. Facilities for skiers, and hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities have been available to the public for some time.

The projects are in a picturesque tree-covered mountainous region of the 460,000 acre reservation which is bisected by the Sacramento, a southern extension of the Rockies and the first major mountain range west of the Appalachians. The nearby towns of Ruidoso and Cloudcroft now serve as a major recreation center for residents of west Texas and southern New Mexico.

G. Douglas Hofe, Jr., Director of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation which administers the Land and Water Conservation Fund program for the Department, commended both the Tribe and the New Mexico State planning department for their effective cooperative efforts in developing the project proposals.

Federal funds for the projects -- \$116,035 for the Eagle Lake Recreation Area and \$112,942 for the Spring Lake area -- are provided from the State of Mexico's Land and Water Conservation Fund apportionments. The Tribe is providing 20 percent of the matching funds required for the Federal grants, and the Economic Development Administration's Four Corners Regional Commission is providing 30 percent.

The total of \$457,954, in Federal and matching funds, will be used to develop a 54-unit trailer campground at Eagle Lake and a 45 unit trailer campground at Spring Lake. Picnic areas with grills and parking areas also will be developed. Support facilities at each area will include underground electric utility lines, water and sewer systems and a trash compactor. Part of the funds will be used to improve existing access roads.

The campgrounds, which will be screened from view from the nearby lakes, will increase by about 80 percent the availability of trailer camp spaces in the area. The nearby, more primitive, Forest Service campgrounds, are in constant demand, and the few private trailer parks in the vicinity cannot accommodate the increasing numbers of trailer campers. Eventually Tribal officials hope to build additional campgrounds near other Reservation lakes.

The Mescalero Apache Tribe's "Triad" recreational development program, of which these campgrounds are a part, has been underway for about 11 years. The major elements of the program are: 1) expansion of the Sierra Blanca Ski area on both Tribal and Forest Service lands where the facilities are owned and operated by the Tribe, and now receives about 400,000 visitors a year; 2) development of a 125 room resort hotel at Cienegita Canyon with an 18 hole golf course and 100-acre man-made lake, on which construction is expected to begin this Spring and completion is anticipated in 1973; and 3) a longer-range plan to set aside a large natural area on the Reservation and allow only minimal development.

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Background notes on Mescalero Apache Recreation Development Plan are attached.

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BACKGROUND

#### MESCALERO APACHE TRIBE'S TRIAD DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Tribe's program to provide public outdoor recreation opportunities on its Reservation has been underway for about 11 years. In the initial stages, the Tribal Council consulted with Bureau of Outdoor Recreation planners, among others. The final plans evolved gradually after several studies and with the encouragement of the New Mexico State Planning Department, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other Federal agency field officials.

The 460,000 acre Reservation in south central New Mexico consists of lands ranging from 5-12,000 feet. It is bisected by the Sacramentos, a southern extension of the Rockies and the first major mountain range west of the Mississippi, and contains about 280,000 acres of alpine forested lands; the rest is grazing lands. About 100,000 acres will be opened for public recreation and enjoyment.

Two lakes were built on the reservation in 1950; 16 small fishing lakes were added in 1964, and two in 1967. Three more lakes are planned. Fishing is excellent. Hunting is open for deer and bear during the reservation hunting season. An elk herd is being developed. The Tribe is returning much of its land to its natural state, by placing utilities underground and removing incompatible developments that are no longer needed.

The first major step in the recreational development program was taken about eight years ago when the Tribe, with Bureau of Indian Affairs loan assistance, bought and improved the ski facilities at the Sierra Blanca ski area which had been privately developed on Forest Service lands and a small part of the Reservation. The resort area now has an 8,000 ft. gondola lift, a 5,000 ft. double chair lift, 3 T-bar lifts, 2 poma lifts, and 40 miles of ski trails. It receives about 400,000 visitors per year, and counts a total of 90,000 skier man days of use during the ski season which lasts from Thanksgiving to Easter. The rest of the year the area is used for hunting, hiking and other forms of outdoor recreation. The Tribe hopes to exchange lands with the Forest Service to bring the entire area into the Reservation, and plans to build a 50 room ski lodge and restaurant to accommodate visitors.

Construction is expected to begin this summer on a 125 room resort hotel, the Cienegita Canyon Hotel, a 100 acre man-made lake, and an 18 hole golf course. Funding, through EDA, has been approved for the hotel building, and completion is anticipated in 1973.

A natural area also has been in the planning stage for some time. Specific plans for funding applications now are being prepared. The Tribe plans to keep the area in a near wilderness condition with minimal development.

On all of these projects, the Tribe has consulted with the townspeople of Ruidoso and Cloudcroft, as well as various Federal and State agencies before commencing development.

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