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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT FAVORS BILL PERMITTING LONGER LEASES ON FORT MOJAVE INDIAN LANDS

The Department of the Interior today announced its endorsement of proposed Federal legislation that would permit the leasing of Indian lands on the Fort Mojave Reservation in Arizona, California, and Nevada for periods up to a maximum of 99 years.

Under present law the maximum term permitted for such leases is 25 years, with an option to renew for an additional 25 years.

In a report on a bill pending in Congress, John A. Carver, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Public Land Management, said legislation is needed to permit leases with a term long enough so a lessee can obtain financing for the type of real-estate development contemplated on the Fort Mojave Reservation. The lands have a high potential for recreation and a lease proposal is now under consideration.

"Difficult problems arise under present laws limiting leases to what is the equivalent of a 50-year period," Assistant Secretary Carver explained. "By the time financing is obtained by the lessee, the lease has less than 50 years to run. The Federal Reserve Act and the National Housing Act require a minimum of 50-year leases before approving loans secured by leaseholdings."

"A longer term will permit the financing of maximum development of the tribal lands," he added. "This does not mean that all leases will be for the maximum term allowed by law. As a matter of policy, the Department will not approve leases for terms longer than needed to get the best return for the Indian owners."

The Department's report also pointed out that 99-year leasing authority has been provided by Congress for the Palm Springs, Navajo, Seminole, Colorado River, and Southern Ute Indian reservations.

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