



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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To stimulate wider competitive bidding and more active development of Indian-owned mineral resources, the Department of the Interior has substantially liberalized the acreage limitations in the Federal regulations governing the mineral leasing of Indian lands, it was announced today.

Under the new regulations approved by Acting Secretary Hatfield Chilson on February 28, the maximum area that may be covered by a single lease for development of all minerals (including oil and gas), except coal, is established at 2,560 acres. However, individual lessees are not limited, as they were under the former regulations, in the amount of Indian land they may hold under more than one lease in a particular State.

On the leasing of Indian lands for coal development, the limitation under the new regulations will ordinarily be 2,560 acres for one lease. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, however, is authorized to approve the combining of several coal mining leases held by one or more lessees or the issuance of a single lease covering more than 2,560 acres when such action is considered to be in the best interests of the Indian landowners and is necessary to permit the establishment of steam electric power plants or other industrial facilities on or near the reservations.

The former acreage limitations were originally established in the period before World War II when deposits of strategic metals and nonmetals in Indian lands were not being widely developed because of inadequate transportation facilities or remoteness from mills and markets. More recently there has been a growing interest in the commercial development of such deposits.

Under the former regulations the maximum amount of Indian land in a single State that could be held by one lessee was limited to 640 acres on "deposits of the nature of lodes or veins, containing ores of gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, or other useful metals;" 960 acres for "beds of placer gold, gypsum, asphaltum, phosphate, iron ores or other useful minerals except coal, oil and gas" unless otherwise authorized by the Commissioner; and 10,240 acres for coal mining.

While no acreage limitations have been in effect on oil and gas leasing for the past several years, very few tracts of Indian land advertised for such leasing have exceeded the 2,560-acre limit established by the new regulations.

The new regulations do not apply on the Osage or Quapaw Indian lands of Oklahoma where special regulations on mineral leasing still remain in effect.

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