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Interior Secretary Cecil D. Andrus and Edward E. Hopson, Sr., President of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation in Alaska, today signed an agreement conveying land to the Arctic Slope Eskimos mandated by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

"In addition to resolving major land issues, this agreement "is the first in the history of the Native Claims Settlement Act in which private lands are placed under the Endangered Species Act," Andrus noted

Features of the pact include:

Facilitating environmentally sound oil and gas development in the arctic which could lead to exploratory drilling within a year;

Consolidating land ownership patterns around the village of Anaktuvuk Pass within the boundaries of the Gates of the Arctic National Monument, thus facilitating Federal management and -reducing operating costs of both the monument and the Native lands;

Reducing private inholdings within Gates of the Arctic National Monument by more than 115,000 acres, thus saving the Federal government substantial costs of land acquisition; and

Land use restrictions along the Colville River to protect one of the more important breeding grounds for the Peregrine Falcon in North America.

The signing concludes six months of intensive negotiations concerning the conveyance and exchange of lands within the Kurupa Lake, Killik River and other areas of the Arctic Slope Region.

"Our Native Corporation will now move to develop the mineral potential of our lands and, hopefully, lessen our Nation's dependence on foreign energy," Hopson said.

He added that "the agreement to protect the falcon in the Arctic shows the ability of the Department of the Interior and a major landowner to allow resource exploration and development and yet to pay attention to the concerns for its wildlife, environment and culture. "

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