



PRESIDENT SIGNS—Paul Bernal (left) and Juan De Jesus Romero of the Taos Pueblo delegation witness a historic moment in Indian affairs as President Nixon signs into law H.R. 471 on December 15 returning to the Taos Pueblo people

approximately 48,000 acres of land and the Blue Lake. The signing ceremonies ended 64 years of effort by the people of Taos Pueblo to regain these lands.

—U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR Photo

Nixon Signs Taos Pueblo Land Bill

On December 15, President Nixon signed H.R. 471, the bill which declares that certain lands in Carson National Forest, New Mexico are held in trust for the Pueblo de Taos.

The 48,000 acre tract of land includes the Blue Lake area, the center of Taos Pueblo religious customs since the fourteenth century.

In 1906, the land was made part of the Carson National Forest. The Indian Claims Commission determined the government took these lands without compensation. Due to the importance of this area to their people, the Taos Pueblo have refused to take money in compensation and pushed for the return of these lands.

H.R. 471 declares the U.S. holds title, in trust for the Pueblo de Taos, to the Blue Lake area. It will become part of the Pueblo de Taos reservation, administered by the Secretary of the Interior as are other such trust lands.

Under the new law, the Indians can use the land for traditional purposes only—religious ceremonies, hunting and fishing, a source of water, forage for livestock, wood, timber and other natural resources for their personal use.

Except for these uses, the land will forever remain wild and will be administered as a wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964.

The act also provides for entry of nonmembers of the tribe, with consent of the Taos Pueblo, for purposes compatible with

wilderness preservation. It authorizes the Pueblo, with tribal funds, to arrange the relinquishment of present leases or permits which were previously granted concerning the lands.

Finally, the bill directs the Indian Claims Commission to determine to what extent the value of the Blue Lake area offsets any claims the Taos may have against the United States.