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DOE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY WILL REMAIN IN CONTROL OF THE ARID LANDS ECOLOGY RESERVE

The Fitzner-Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology Reserve (ALE) will be held by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) for the foreseeable future, according to Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary in a letter to the Yakama Indian Nation informing them of DOE's decision. The ALE Reserve covers approximately 120-square-miles and is the bounding area adjacent to the southwest side of the 560-square-mile Hanford Site in southeast Washington state.

DOE's Richland Operations Office is managing the large scale, long term, environmental cleanup resulting from nuclear weapons material production at the Hanford Site.

In her July 31, 1996 letter to the Yakamas, O'Leary said, "A change in ownership would result in unacceptable cost to the Department in meeting standards imposed as a result of a change in the site boundary." Costs referred to are the safety analysis reviews and public safety enhancements of site facilities that would be required and which could cost millions of dollars.

The ALE will continue to serve as a buffer for nuclear waste cleanup activities in the central plateau areas of the Hanford Site. O'Leary also stated that "...the Department intends to enter into an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to manage the area to protect its natural resources and cultural values, while allowing increased access for appropriate activities."

The Department announced in 1993 that ALE could possibly be declared excess to DOE needs after environmental remediation was complete. In May 1995, the Department and the state co-hosted a public meeting to discuss future uses and management options for the Reserve. Public sentiment at that meeting was nearly unanimous in support of retaining ALE in a single piece and preserving its unique environmental qualities. There was also strong support for protection of the ALE as a national wildlife refuge.

As John Wagoner, DOE's Hanford Site Manager, explained, "The Secretary's decision honors her commitment to make Department lands available for other appropriate uses, is in the best interest of the Department, protects the ALE, and recognizes the shared values of the interested parties. The decision also protects Native American rights and interests."

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