

By Diane Maddex
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SAIPAN -- A United States policy paper on the eventual transfer of public lands from the Trust Territory government to the districts of Micronesia is due to be released on Saipan today, according to Mary Vance Trent, State Department status liaison officer.

"This paper requests the Congress of Micronesia to pass such enabling legislation as is necessary to effect the early transfer of title to public lands," Miss Trent said last night.

"In it the U.S. also requests the legislatures in each district to formally indicate the wishes of the people in the districts with respect to public lands in their districts--whether they wish the trust administration to turn over the lands and, if so, to whom and when."

Miss Trent said the full text of the paper could not be released until copies were given to Sen. Lazarus Sali, chairman of the Congress of Micronesia's Joint Committee on Future Status, and High Commissioner Edward E. Johnston.

The release of the position paper now comes as a surprise. The joint committee had stipulated that the public lands issue, particularly in Palau, had to be resolved before the start of the next round of negotiations with the United States, but it was not expected that the U.S. would make known its position before the talks got under way. They are scheduled to begin in Washington Nov. 13.

Miss Trent said the U.S. position paper applied to all public lands in Micronesia, except those military retention lands presently under negotiation principally in the Marianas.

"According to current calculations, approximately 60 percent of Micronesia's total land area is public land," she said in briefly summarizing the paper's contents. "The United States as administering authority of the Trust Territory has always considered public lands as property held in trust for the people of Micronesia.

"This paper comes after the United States has completed extensive studies of the public land problems in all the districts."

Miss Trent said the paper further provides for a land cadastral evaluation program to be completed in three years under the direction of the Trust Territory.

Certain limitations and safeguards to the transfer of public lands are also spelled out in the paper, she said. These concern such areas as TT installations, post offices, district headquarters and homesteads on public lands.

"Of particular note is the fact that the paper contains a lot of flexibility, but it is specific enough rather than just a statement of principles," said Miss Trent. "It shows the U.S.' willingness to let the Micronesians decide what they want to do with their public lands as a move toward self-government."