

Loss of the Disputed Northeast Corner

About the only thing of value on the reservation, U.S. Indian Office inspectors wrote, was the abundant stand of timber in a four-mile strip along the eastern boundary. The Indian agent at Tule River in the 1880s recommended selling off this resource to settlers because in his opinion the Indians could never make use of it.

In 1884, the federal government approved an erroneous or fraudulent survey by a local surveyor. On the basis of this survey, parts of the northeast corner of the Tule River Reservation passed into private ownership by settlers beginning in the late 1880s.

An Act of Congress on May 17, 1928 legalized this encroachment on Indian land by redrawing the boundaries of the reservation to exclude the disputed territory. The Act was passed surreptitiously to satisfy timber interests who had bought out the original homesteaders, built a road, and were logging in the area.

The Superintendent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Sacramento Agency - and the Tule River Indians - were not made aware of the boundary change until February the following year. Their best land and most valuable natural asset, other than the river itself, was given away to commercial interests.

It is important to realize that the Tule River Indians were not passive witnesses to this injustice. Through a sympathetic agent they repeatedly and urgently petitioned the U.S. government for a proper survey, as records show in 1904, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1915, and 1930.