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Seminole suit

State taking it seriously

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (UPI) — Attorney General Jim Smith says he is not taking lightly lawsuits in which Seminole and Miccosukee Indians lay claim to millions of acres of valuable land in Southwest Florida, some of it in private ownership.

If successful, Smith said, the suits "could have a significant effect on land titles in Southwest Florida."

He notified the governor and Cabinet Thursday that he will try to negotiate an out-of-court settlement favorable to the state. If not, he said, he will vigorously fight the claims.

The Indians indicated a willingness to negotiate a settlement, he said.

The Miccosukee Tribe filed its suit Jan. 17 in federal district court in Miami. It is similar but more extensive than one filed by the Seminoles over a year ago.

The Miccosukees alleged that the

— Granted easements in 1950 to the flood control district over 49,920 acres of land held in trust for the Miccosukees as a reservation without consent of or payment to the Indians.

— Acquired in 1964 a right-of-way across the Miccosukee Reservation for construction of Alligator Alley without consent of or payment to the Indians, and without approval of the Secretary of Interior in violation of the 1790 (correct) Indian Non-Intercourse Act.

— Divested the Indians of 5 million acres of land now in private ownership in Southwest Florida, set aside by presidential orders in 1839 and 1842, allegedly creating a Miccosukee executive order reservation.

The area claimed includes all of Charlotte, Highlands, Glades, Hendry and Collier Counties and parts of DeSoto, Palm Beach, Broward, Dade and Monroe Counties.