Area Indians try
to regain service

The Coushatta Indian tribe of Elton is attempting to regain federal services administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and available to federally recognized Indians, according to David Garrison of Lake Charles, commissioner of the Governor's Commission on Indian Affairs.

These special services were discontinued administratively since formal relationships with the Louisiana Coushattas were never officially terminated, Garrison said.

"The case of the Coushatta tribe has been under extensive review by this commission. It is the opinion of this commission that these Indians have been unjustifiably and illegally deprived of Bureau services since 1953," he said.

The Coushatta tribe, with approximately 250 members, has lived in Allen Parish near Elton and Kinder since the early part of the 19th Century.

The tribe, discovered by De Soto in 1540, signed the Creek Treaty of Aug. 9, 1814, thus creating a formal relationship with the United States, Garrison said.

On Feb. 9, 1893, the United States issued an Indian Trust Patent for 160 acres to Sissy Robinson Alabama, a Coushatta woman. In 1933, the trust was divided under Bureau supervision, and the two parcels continued to be held in trust for the heirs of Sissy Robinson Alabama until June 11, 1953, when fee patents were issued to the heirs.

"The meager trust land base of the Coushattas thus disappeared," the commissioner said.

During the 1930's the United States government granted payment to the Allen Parish Public School District for the tuition of Coushatta pupils. The Bureau of Indian Affairs maintained a federal elementary school in the 1940s, after a reduction in income created a difficulty for the state of Louisiana to maintain an Indian school in the Coushatta community, he explained.

The federal government contracted a physician for medical care from 1940 to 1952. In 1953, however, according to Garrison, these services were administratively withdrawn by the Bureau of Indian Affairs without the consent of the Coushatta people.

In 1953, Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 109 for the purpose of terminating federal supervision over the affairs of Indians.

The Coushatta tribe was requested by the Bureau to sign a resolution terminating them and they refused, Garrison said.

"Their federal relationship has been ignored by the Bureau ever since. This Commission feels that the Bureau of Indian Affairs has a legal and moral obligation to recognize Coushatta Indians and provide such services as are normally provided to federally recognized Indian tribes," Garrison said.

The Coushatta tribe has petitioned the Governor and the Louisiana Congressional delegation to support their efforts to regain federal recognition.

"They have been extremely helpful," Garrison said. "The state legislature passed Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 38 last May formally recognizing the tribe by the state and requesting the Bureau of Indian Affairs to extend services."