



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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Steve Goldstein (O) (202) 208-6416
(H) (202) 887-5248

INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN ANNOUNCES PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR GRANTING TRUST STATUS TO INDIAN LANDS

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan today announced proposed guidelines to govern future decisions on the granting of trust status for off-reservation lands acquired by Indian tribes

"Many tribes are seeking to acquire land outside of their historic reservations to improve their prospects for economic development, and Interior has proposed a new policy to guide the acquisition process," Lujan said in remarks prepared for the Western Governors' Association in Fargo, North Dakota.

The Secretary said proposed new acquisition rules include the following:

- An economic development plan must be submitted by the tribes, specifying how the land will be used;
- A consultation process with local, city, county and state governments to resolve possible conflicts over zoning, taxation and other jurisdictional issues;
- A limitation that tribes may acquire trust land only in states where they already own trust land.

"We have proposed additional guidelines relating to Indian trust acquisitions for gaming purposes: Regulations that would require tribes to explore economic alternatives to gaming, and a requirement that any gaming establishment must meet all local safety and health ordinances," Lujan said.

"Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Eddie Brown and I look forward to working with tribal governments and all of you as we consider these guidelines," Lujan told the Governors. "I'm certain these proposed regulations will strengthen the economic development of Indian communities as we help pave the road to self-determination for all American Indians."

(more)

Lujan said the proposed guidelines are in keeping with the Interior Department's commitment to encourage and support Indian tribes in their efforts to develop economically and to strengthen tribal sovereignty.

The Secretary directed Interior officials to work on the guidelines because of the many requests that have been made by Indian tribes to have off-reservation land approved for federal trust status. A number of these requests involve land in or near large municipalities where tribes propose operating bingo or other gaming enterprises.

Lujan said he expects a newly established Indian Gaming Commission headed by Tony Hope to be "at full speed" by October.

The Secretary also noted that the Interior Department is working with Indian tribal governments in a demonstration program of self-governance and self-determination.

"This month, as part of our efforts to help tribes establish economic independence, the Bureau of Indian Affairs increased tribal authority over the federal funds they receive," Lujan said. " Now, six western tribes have control over more than \$15 million in federal funding. This is an impressive step forward for these ambitious Americans."

The tribes in Washington, California, Oklahoma and Minnesota will have the authority to establish budgeting procedures and shift federal resources based on changing tribal needs.