Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Under Secretary of the Interior James Joseph met April 13 with a delegation from the Crow Indian Tribe from Montana.

Joseph told the delegation the Department of the Interior stands solidly behind its trust obligation to Indian tribes to protect their lands and natural resources and supported strong tribal governments.

The Crow delegates discussed recently adopted tribal codes including a new law and order code which has brought some unfavorable reactions from non-Indians in Montana. The code provides for the exercise of criminal jurisdiction by the tribe over non-Indians on the reservation.

The delegates told Joseph they desire to meet with state and local officials in Montana to work out plans agreeable to both sides on the jurisdiction issue. They said they are concerned with the protection of the rights of all people involved -- both Indian and non-Indian.

The Crow delegates said that they will be holding public hearings on the whole matter of jurisdiction so that all residents of the reservation Indian and non-Indian can express their concerns.

The reservations in Montana have a high percentage of non-Indian residents and non-Indian landowners. About 2,000 of the 6,500 residents on the Crow reservation are non-Indians.

Indian tribal leaders in Montana have said that the tribes "have asserted jurisdiction over non-Indians only to the precise and limited extent provided by Federal law and decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court."

The Under Secretary indicated that he was pleased with the positive attitude of the meeting and expressed hope that any difficulties would be resolved amicably.