Action on long-standing requests restores tribal lands, removes barrier to Nation's gaming and other economic development projects

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney announced today that she has approved two long-standing land-into-trust applications from The Osage Nation in Oklahoma for its casino projects in the cities of Bartlesville and Pawhuska. The applications were first submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 2014 and 2016, respectively.

The Nation lost more than 90 percent of its land base in 1907 when Oklahoma became a state and incorporated the Osage reservation as Osage County. The Nation relies on its own economic activities to fund its governmental programs and services. Approval of the two applications will provide the Nation with significant economic development opportunities.

“With this action, The Osage Nation can now move forward on its economic development plans and enjoy the benefits of its lands,” said **Assistant Secretary Sweeney**. “I congratulate Principal Chief Standing Bear and the Osage people on this achievement. Your success is a testament to your determination to bring greater prosperity to The Osage Nation now and for generations to come.”

“Land is central to the Osage way of life. We are celebrating today because the approval of our Pawhuska and Bartlesville trust applications returns some of our land to us with full tribal authority,” said **Osage Nation Principal Chief Geoffrey M. Standing Bear**. “Interior Assistant Secretary Tara Sweeney, her deputy, Mark Cruz, [Office of Indian Gaming] Director Paula Hart and Deputy Director Maria Wiseman each deserve high praise for their diligent and prompt action to approve our applications after they languished for nearly a decade in the dust bins of the federal bureaucracy. Now the Osage Nation will begin at once to turn dirt and construct new amenities on these parcels that will help boost our region’s economic recovery from this COVID-19 pandemic.”

In January 2014, the Nation submitted to the BIA an application to transfer into trust for gaming and other purposes approximately 125 acres of land, known as the Bartlesville Property and located within the Nation’s former reservation, on U.S. Highway 60 approximately two miles west of the city of Bartlesville. The Nation proposes to construct a casino of approximately 57,400 square feet and a hotel with 150 rooms and approximately 11,800 square feet of meeting space. The Department is taking the property into trust pursuant to Section 5 of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) and under a determination that the trust parcel is eligible for gaming pursuant to Section 20 of Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA). The Department also determined that the parcel is eligible for gaming pursuant to the “Oklahoma Exception” of Section 20 of IGRA, which authorizes gaming on lands acquired by the Secretary in trust for the benefit of an Indian tribe after October 17, 1988.

In 2016, the Nation submitted an application to transfer into trust approximately 63.1 acres of land

known as the Pawhuska Property, also located in Osage County, for gaming and other purposes. The Nation will move its existing Pawhuska Osage Casino to 17 acres on the site and eventually replace it with a proposed casino and hotel project that will be located approximately 300 feet directly across Highway 99/60.

*The **Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs** advises the Secretary of the Interior on Indian Affairs policy issues, communicates policy to and oversees the programs of the BIA and the BIE, provides leadership in consultations with tribes, and serves as the DOI official for intra- and inter-departmental coordination and liaison within the Executive Branch on Indian matters.*

*The **Office of Indian Gaming** acts as the primary advisor to the Secretary and Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs on Indian gaming and the requirements of Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), P.L. 100-497, and other federal laws. Its duties and responsibilities include the administrative review and analysis of IGRA's statutory and regulatory requirements and related statutes as well as policy development and technical assistance to tribal and state stakeholders. OIG implements the Secretary's responsibilities under IGRA and, as such, has a significant impact on economic development resulting from Indian gaming.*

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