Scholarships will fund opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students

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WASHINGTON, DC – With a transfer of nearly $1 million, the Department of the Interior today announced that total contributions to the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund have surpassed $5 million for 2014. The Scholarship Fund was authorized by the historic Cobell Settlement and is funded in part by the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations (Buy-Back Program). The Scholarship Fund will provide financial assistance through scholarships to American Indian and Alaska Native students wishing to pursue post-secondary education and training.

“As we developed the Buy-Back Program in partnership with Cobell plaintiffs, we sought not only to right the wrongs of the past, but to provide for future generations of Native American youth,” said Interior Solicitor Hilary Tompkins. “This Program is a rare opportunity to shape the future course of Indian Country and this investment in our next generation of tribal leaders will create a lasting, living legacy for Indian nations.”

Interior makes quarterly transfers to the Scholarship Fund as a result of Buy-Back Program sales, up to a total of $60 million. The amount contributed is based on a formula set forth in the Cobell Settlement that sets aside a certain amount of funding depending on the value of the fractionated interest sold. These contributions do not reduce the amount that an owner will receive for voluntarily consolidating their interests.

The Scholarship Fund is administered by the American Indian College Fund in Denver, Colorado, with 20 percent directed to the American Indian Graduate Center in Albuquerque, N.M. A five-member Board of Trustees is responsible for the oversight and supervision of the activities of the Fund’s administering organization and for developing and adopting a charter outlining its role and responsibilities. More information about the Cobell Education Scholarship Program can be found at the American Indian College Fund website.

The Buy-Back Program was created to implement the land consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement, which provided $1.9 billion to purchase fractionated interests in trust or restricted land from willing landowners. Consolidated interests are transferred to tribal government ownership for uses benefiting the reservation community and tribal members.

To date, the Buy-Back Program has successfully concluded transactions worth more than $300 million and has restored the equivalent of more than 500,000 acres of land to tribal governments.

Offers are currently pending for fractional interest owners at the Squaxin Island Indian Reservation (deadline: January 26, 2015) and the Coeur d’Alene Reservation (deadline: February 2, 2015). Landowners can contact the Trust Beneficiary Call Center at 888-678-6836 with questions about their

purchase offers. Individuals can also visit their local Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) or Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) office, or find more information at www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/landowners in order to make informed decisions about their land.