# Participants in Voluntary Land Buy-Back Program Have 45 Days to Respond

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**WASHINGTON, DC** – Building off of sustained momentum from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations (Buy-Back Program), Deputy Secretary Mike Connor today announced that purchase offers worth more than $63.5 million have been sent to nearly 2,800 landowners with fractional interests on the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation in South Dakota (homeland of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate). Interested sellers will have until November 24, 2014, to return accepted offers.

The tribe will host an outreach event on Wednesday, October 15 at the Tribal Elderly Center in Agency Village, S.D. The all-day event will feature speakers from the Buy-Back Program and staff available to help landowners with questions about their offer packages. Landowners can contact the tribe's staff at: 605-698-8296 or 605-698-8203.

As part of President Obama's pledge to help strengthen Native American communities, the Buy-Back Program has successfully concluded transactions worth more than $146.4 million and has restored the equivalent of more than 280,000 acres of land to tribal governments.

"The Buy-Back Program is a unique opportunity and I am encouraged by the growing interest we are seeing in the Program across Indian Country as well as the partnerships we are developing with tribal governments as implementation moves to each location," said Deputy Secretary Connor. "Payments through Program sales are already making a significant difference for individuals, families and their communities. We will continue to work closely with tribal representatives to ensure that individuals are aware of this historic opportunity."

The Buy-Back Program implements the land consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement, which provided $1.9 billion to purchase fractional interests in trust or restricted land from willing sellers at fair market value within a 10-year period. Individuals who choose to sell their interests receive payments directly into their Individual Indian Money (IIM) accounts. In addition to receiving fair market value for their land based on objective appraisals, sellers also receive a base payment of $75 per offer, regardless of the value of the land.

Consolidated interests are immediately restored to tribal trust ownership for uses benefiting the reservation community and tribal members. For example, the Oglala Sioux Tribe of the Pine Ridge Reservation recently announced that the tribe is embarking on a $9 million housing program, aided by the recent acquisition of land through the Buy-Back Program.

Sales of land interests will also result in up to $60 million in contributions to the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund. This contribution is in addition to the amounts paid to individual sellers, so it will not

reduce the amount landowners receive for their interests.

There are almost 245,000 owners of nearly three million fractional interests, spanning 150 Indian reservations, who are eligible to participate in the Buy-Back Program. Many see little or no economic benefit from what are often very small, undivided interests in lands that cannot be utilized due to their highly fractionated state.

Offers are currently pending at a number of additional locations with deadlines approaching soon, including the **Gila River (TODAY), Northern Cheyenne (Oct. 17), Flathead (Oct. 24), Umatilla (Oct. 31) and Crow (Nov. 21) Indian Reservations.**

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.

Individual participation is voluntary. A decision to sell land for restoration to tribes does not impact a landowner's eligibility to receive individual settlement payments from the Cobell Settlement, which are being handled by the Garden City Group. Inquiries regarding Settlement payments should be directed to 800-961-6109.

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