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

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For Immediate Release: October 6, 2014
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WASHINGTON, DC – Deputy Secretary of the Interior Mike Connor today announced that the Department's Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations (Buy-Back Program) has sent purchase offers worth more than $298 million to nearly 4,000 landowners with fractional interests on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana. Interested sellers will have until November 21, 2014, to return accepted offers.

As part of President Obama's pledge to help strengthen Native American communities, the Buy-Back Program has mailed more than $690 million in purchase offers to date, to more than 41,000 owners of fractionated interests. The Program has successfully concluded transactions worth more than $144 million and has restored the equivalent of nearly 280,000 acres of land to tribal governments.

"Today's announcement continues the Buy-Back Program's momentum, and our commitment to reach as many interested landowners as possible across Indian Country," said Deputy Secretary Connor. "Payments through Program sales are 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 Crow Tribe will host an outreach event on Thursday, October 9 in the Multi-Purpose Building, Crow Agency, Montana. The all-day event will feature speakers from the Buy-Back Program, notary public services, and staff available to help landowners with questions about their offer packages. Landowners can contact the tribe's staff at: 406-638-2041.

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.

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.

Sales of land interests will also result in up to $60 million in contributions to the Cobell Education

Scholarship Fund. This contribution by Interior is in addition to the amounts paid to individual sellers, so it will not reduce the amount landowners receive for their interests.

Offers are currently pending at a number of locations with deadlines approaching soon, including the Gila River (Oct. 10), Northern Cheyenne (Oct. 17), Flathead (Oct. 24) and Umatilla (Oct. 31) 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.