Scholarships will fund opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Department of the Interior today announced that an additional $1 million has been transferred to the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund, bringing the total transferred in 2014 to more than $4.5 million. 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 provides financial assistance through scholarships to American Indian and Alaska Native students wishing to pursue post-secondary education and training.

“The scholarships awarded through this fund will give Native American students the opportunity to pursue their educational dreams so that they can become full-fledged participants in charting the future course of Indian Country positively impact tribal communities, as students gain valuable skills, technical abilities and professional expertise which can strengthen institutional development and spur social and economic progress across Indian Country,” said Interior Solicitor Hilary Tompkins, who played a key role in establishing the scholarship program. “This investment in our next generation of tribal leaders will be a lasting, living legacy for Indian nations.”

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, New Mexico. A five-member Board of Trustees oversees and supervises the activities of the fund administrator. More information about the Cobell Education Scholarship Program can be found at the American Indian College Fund website.

Interior makes quarterly transfers, up to $60 million total, from Buy-Back Program sales to the Scholarship Fund based on a formula 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 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 tribal members and their community.

To date, the Buy-Back Program has successfully concluded transactions worth nearly $142 million and has restored the equivalent of more than 278,000 acres of land to tribal ownership.

Offers are currently pending at a number of locations with deadlines approaching soon. 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. The process for selling fractionated interests is separate from 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.
