Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Department of the Interior today announced the launch of a new, comprehensive resource for Indian landowners and tribal governments seeking information about the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations (Buy-Back Program). The website, http://www.doi.gov/buybackprogram, will serve as a one-stop-shop for visitors interested in timely and regularly updated information about the Buy-Back Program.

As part of President Obama's commitment to help strengthen Indian communities, the Buy-Back Program was created to implement the land consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement, which provided a $1.9 billion fund to purchase fractionated interests in trust or restricted land from willing sellers, at fair market value, within a 10 year period. The Buy-Back Program has the potential to unlock millions of acres of fractionated lands for the benefit of tribal communities.

"We know that one of the keys to the success of this program will be timely and reliable information," said Kevin Washburn, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at Interior. "This website will be one important tool that we will use to communicate with tribes as we work collaboratively to implement a fair, effective and efficient process for individual owners of fractionated interests to participate in the Buy-Back Program."

The new website includes extensive "Frequently Asked Questions" and information to assist individual landowners and tribes in gathering information about how they can participate in the Buy-Back Program and understand the valuation and sale process. Visitors can also get information about the Education Scholarship Fund for American Indians and Alaska Natives. The Buy-Back Program will contribute up to $60 million from land sales to this fund, which will be controlled by a board of trustees nominated by tribal governments. The fund will be administered by the American Indian College Fund in Denver, with 20% allotted to the American Indian Graduate Center in Albuquerque, NM.

As part of today's launch, the Buy-Back Program is making available templates and guidance for the development of cooperative agreements that will allow for resources to be provided to individual tribal governments in order to facilitate their help with implementing the program, especially in key areas such as landowner outreach and education. Although these agreements will be tailored for each tribe, the templates will assist tribal governments with the development of an agreement that is responsive to the specific needs of the nation involved. Tribes may review and familiarize themselves with these documents and are encouraged to contact Buy-Back staff to discuss the documents before preparing or submitting an application.

"We have already begun work with a diverse group of tribes and will be engaging with additional locations and tribes in the coming weeks and months," added Washburn. "To ensure that the Buy-Back Program reaches as many locations as possible over the next 10 years, we are committed to using the funds wisely and have implemented flexible purchase ceilings on each reservation to avoid premature exhaustion of available funds."

The publication of these and other documents to assist tribal governments with outreach comes after

months of government-to-government consultations and discussions with tribes to create agreements that underscore the sovereign and trust responsibilities of each party.

Interior holds about 56 million acres in trust for American Indians. More than 10 million acres are held for individual American Indians and nearly 46 million acres are held for Indian tribes. The Department holds this land in more than 200,000 tracts, of which about 92,000 (on approximately 150 reservations) contain fractional ownership interests subject to purchase by the Buy-Back Program. The Buy-Back Program plans to work with as many of the 150 tribes as possible over its 10-year period. Land research, valuation work, and outreach efforts are already underway at several locations. The Department’s goal is to make offers at one or more initial locations by the end of the year.
