Pueblo of Sandia's tribal regulations among first approved under HEARTH Act

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For Immediate Release: March 14, 2013
Print PDF

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – As part of President Obama's commitment to empowering American Indian tribal nations and strengthening their economies, today Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn joined Pueblo of Sandia Governor Victor Montoya to approve one of the first tribal regulations in the nation issued under the newly enacted Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership Act (HEARTH Act).

The Act, originally introduced by then-Representative Martin Heinrich (NM-1st District), restores the authority of federally recognized Indian tribes to control the leasing of tribal lands, thereby promoting tribal self-determination and spurring economic development.

"Today's action is an historic step forward, not only for the Pueblo of Sandia, but for all of Indian Country," said Salazar. "With these approved leasing regulations, the Pueblo will have the authority to decide how they want to do business on their lands – which is as it should be. I applaud the Pueblo of Sandia for their early leadership and look forward to working with tribes across the nation to approve leasing regulations and to encourage economic development on Indian lands, generating investment, new jobs and revenues."
The signing ceremony took place at the Pueblo of Sandia's tribal council offices in the foothills of the Sandia Mountains, just north of the City of Albuquerque. The reservation consists of approximately 40 square miles.

"Today's adoption of these tribal leasing regulations under the HEARTH Act will allow the Pueblo to be more responsive to leasing proposals and opportunities, and to directly regulate the leasing of our lands, furthering the fundamental goals of maintaining tribal sovereignty and achieving tribal self-determination and self-sufficiency," said Governor Montoya on behalf of the Pueblo of Sandia. "Under the direction of our Tribal Council, we have established a successful record of business management and economic development, and are able to assess opportunities and proposals for the leasing of our lands. We also have developed strong environmental regulatory and land management capabilities. The Pueblo is ready, willing and able to relieve the federal government of some of its regulatory burden over the leasing of tribal lands, and to assume direct regulatory authority and responsibility over the leasing of our lands."

President Obama signed the HEARTH Act into law in July 2012. Under the law, federally recognized tribal governments can develop and implement their own regulations authorizing long-term leasing of Indian lands for residential, business and other purposes. Upon one-time approval of these tribal regulations by the Secretary of the Interior, tribes will have the authority to process land leases without Bureau of Indian Affairs approval. This authority will greatly expedite the time it takes to approve leases for homes and small businesses in Indian Country.

“A hallmark of self-determination is that it should be the tribe that decides how its lands may be used for the good of its members, and that is what the HEARTH Act means to accomplish,” said Assistant Secretary Washburn. “I congratulate Governor Montoya and council members on the successful development of their tribe’s surface leasing regulations. It is an action that will help Sandia secure the well-being of its future generations and support the self-reliance for which the Pueblo people always have been known.”

The Pueblo of Sandia's regulations are only the second in the nation to be approved, after the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, located in California, whose regulations were approved last month. The Sandia Pueblo expects to use the regulations to promote leasing on Pueblo Indian Land for economic development and other purposes.

“One of my proudest moments in Congress was when the HEARTH Act was signed into law,” said Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM). “We’ve opened doors to homeownership for tribal families in New Mexico and across the country. The HEARTH Act will help jumpstart economic development in Indian Country by making it easier for Native families to buy and build houses and open businesses in the communities where their families have lived for generations. I join Secretary Salazar in applauding the Pueblo of Sandia for their early leadership and look forward to continue working with our Indian tribes to make New Mexico a great place to raise a family.”

The HEARTH Act complements a parallel effort at Interior to overhaul the BIA regulations governing its process for approving the surface leases on lands the federal government holds in trust for Indian tribes and individuals. As trustee, Interior manages about 56 million surface acres in Indian Country. The regulations were finalized in December 2012, and represent the most comprehensive reform of the leasing regulations in more than half a century. The final regulations streamline the leasing approval process on federal Indian lands, thereby spurring increased homeownership, and expediting business and commercial development, including renewable energy projects.

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