Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

**Media Contact:** Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
**For Immediate Release:** September 20, 2012
Print PDF

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – In keeping with its mission to establish responsive, accountable, transparent, and customer-friendly management of Indian trust funds and assets, the Secretarial Commission on Indian Trust Administration and Reform reached out to Indian Country at its fifth public meeting of the year in Bismarck, N.D. All five Commission members – Chair Fawn Sharp, Tex G. "Red Tipped Arrow" Hall, Stacy Leeds, Dr. Peterson Zah, and Robert Anderson – participated in the September 13-14, 2012, conference.

The day before the meeting the Commission visited the Fort Berthold Reservation, home of the Three Affiliated Tribes, for a facilitated public discussion on trust administration. In addition, an outreach session for youth to offer their ideas, an important part of the Commission's efforts, was held the evening of September 13 at the United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) in Bismarck.

"I have been very gratified at the level of feedback the Secretarial Commission has received to date, and especially at this meeting," said Chair Fawn Sharp. "All of the ideas, comments, and recommendations are extremely valuable to the Commission's work as it moves forward on accomplishing the mandate established for it by Secretary Salazar."

"I want to thank all of those who helped make this meeting so productive, especially UTTC President Gipp, the Three Affiliated Tribes, our speakers, and especially the tribal leaders, organizations, students, and members of the public who took the time give us their thoughts on how the Interior Department can and should manage its trust responsibilities," Sharp said.

The Secretarial Commission on Indian Trust Administration and Reform was established by Secretary Ken Salazar to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Department's management and administration of nearly $4 billion in American Indian trust assets over two years and to offer recommendations on improvements in the future. Building on progress made with the historic Cobell Settlement, the Commission will help to establish a new era of trust administration: one that stresses responsive, accountable, transparent, and customer-friendly management of these substantial funds and assets.

During their visit to the Fort Berthold Reservation, Commission members toured the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Fort Berthold Agency in New Town and inspected one of the Tribes' oil well pads. They were joined by representatives from Interior's Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians, Office of the Solicitor for Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Land Management's Office of Natural Resources Revenue, the Indian Affairs Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development, and Lizzie Marsters, Chief of Staff to Interior Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes and the Designated Federal Officer for the Commission, all of whom also attended the public discussion.

The public discussion, which was moderated by Commission member and Three Affiliated Tribes Chairman Hall, focused on the challenges and impacts of the oil and gas leasing boom taking place in western North Dakota.

At its public meeting on September 13 and 14, the Commission heard from tribal leaders, representatives of tribal organizations, allottees, and other members of the Indian trust public on ways to improve the Department's handling of its trust responsibilities.

Attendees heard panel presentations on Hard Assets and Trust Reform and Trust Models. Members of the Hard Assets panel were Jeanne Whiteing, who addressed water rights issues; Tom Fredericks who spoke on strengthening the federal trust responsibility with respect to hard assets; and Helen Sanders, an allottee who provided a landowner's perspective.

The Trust Reform and Trust Models panel members were Mario Gonzalez, who spoke on treaty rights and approaches to the trust responsibility, and Janie Hipp, senior advisor for tribal relations in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Tribal Relations, who talked about USDA's approach to the trust responsibility and appraisals, the Keepseagle Settlement, and USDA grants.

The youth-outreach event, hosted by UTTC President Dr. David Gipp, was very well attended. Commission members heard from students and other concerned Native youth on their views about Indian trust management and administration.

"We had a very productive and informative three days in Bismarck, from learning about the oil and gas leasing challenges at the Fort Bethold Reservation to hearing testimony from tribal leaders, tribal organizations and allottees about ways in which the Department could improve coordination and services to Indian Country," said Marsters.

The Commission has held its meetings via the internet and in person. Its first public meeting took place on March 1-2, 2012, in Washington, D.C., followed by public webinars on May 16 and August 13, and a public meeting in Albuquerque on July 11-12. Future events include a public webinar on November 7 and a public meeting in Seattle, Wash., on December 6-7, 2012.

American Indian and Alaska Native tribal leaders, tribal organizations, and individuals are invited to provide recommendations and possible solutions on improving the Department's Indian trust management and administration and the delivery of services to Indian Country. Comments and recommendations may be sent by email to trustcommission@ios.doi.gov.

To learn more about the Secretarial Commission on Indian Trust Administration and Reform and its activities, please visit http://www.doi.gov/cobell/commission/index.cfm.

**-DOI-**