Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: July 31, 2012
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Acting Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Donald E. "Del" Laverdure today announced that the U.S. Department of the Interior will conduct a series of listening sessions with federally-recognized tribes regarding American Indian sacred sites located on federal lands.

"It is critical that we listen to tribal people about sensitive and significant cultural issues concerning sacred sites," said Laverdure. "Our nation-to-nation relationship is one that is based upon mutual respect, and that includes an on-going dialogue about places central to Indian identity and cultural ways of life."

The Obama Administration recognizes that the protection of sacred sites on federal lands is integral to traditional religious practices, tribal identities and emblematic of sovereign tribal nations. These sacred site listening sessions are intended to assist in developing policies that result in effective, comprehensive and long-lasting federal protection of, and tribal access to, the places that are so important to the fabric and culture of tribal nations.

To address tribal concerns regarding sacred sites issues, Interior will conduct listening sessions on sacred sites in general, as well as knowledge relating to specific sites on Interior-managed tribal trust and other federal lands. The Department will be better equipped to make decisions that are sensitive to the ceremonial use and physical integrity of sacred sites through the benefit of tribal input and views on such matters.

"We invite recognized leaders of tribal governments and, if a tribe so elects, extend the invitation to designated spiritual leaders granted authority by the recognized tribal leadership to participate as tribal officials." Laverdure said. "Tribal leaders have worked very hard with Interior in the past on these issues and we acknowledge their tireless efforts and hard work."

Interior is seeking input regarding sacred sites, including:

• Meanings of sacred sites and whether the Department should attempt to define the term "sacred site";

• Personal views of existing Departmental practices or policies, if any, that should be revised to protect sacred sites and steps necessary to make appropriate revisions;

• Potential development of Departmental practices or policies to protect sacred sites;

• How the Department should facilitate tribal access to sacred sites;

• How the Department should control and grant access to tribally provided information regarding sacred sites;

• Whom the Department should include (recognized leaders of tribal government, tribal spiritual leaders, et.al.) in determining whether a site is considered "sacred" by a tribe.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs will conduct the sacred sites listening sessions at the following dates and times:

August 13, 2012
Sacred Sites Session, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
BIA Southwest Regional Office
Pete V. Domenici Building
1001 Indian School Road
Albuquerque, NM 87104
(505) 563-3103

August 16, 2012
Sacred Sites Session, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Holiday Inn-Grand Montana Billings
5500 Midland Road
Billings, MT 59101
(406) 248-7701

August 23, 2012
Sacred Sites Session, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Mystic Lake Casino Hotel
2400 Mystic Lake Boulevard
Prior Lake, MN 55372
(952) 445-9000

August 24, 2012
Sacred Sites Session, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Mohegan Sun Casino
1 Mohegan Sun Boulevard
Uncasville, CT 06382
(860) 862-7311

August 28, 2012
Sacred Sites Session, 9:00 am – 12:00pm
Bureau of Indian Affairs 911 Federal Building - Auditorium
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, OR 97232

Because many Indian tribes have belief systems that discourage or even prohibit the disclosure of the location or other information about sacred sites and places, Interior will respect tribal requests that information about such locations be kept confidential and only share this information with appropriate agency personnel.

For all those unable to attend any of these listening sessions, please send your input/suggestions by September 21, 2012, via email to consultation@bia.gov or the U.S. Department of the Interior, attn.: Mr. Dion Killsback, Counselor to the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, 1849 C Street, NW, MS 4141-MIB, Washington, DC 20240. Should you have additional questions, Mr. Killsback can be reached at (202) 208-6939.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs discharges the duties of the Secretary of the Interior with the authority and direct responsibility to strengthen the government-to-government relationship with the nation's 566 federally recognized tribes, advocate policies that support Indian self-determination, protect and preserve Indian trust assets, and administer a wide array of laws, regulations and functions relating to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, tribal members and individual trust beneficiaries. The Assistant Secretary oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education. For more information, visit www.indianaffairs.gov.