Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Carl J. Artman today issued a Final Determination to decline acknowledgment of the Federal Acknowledgment Process petitioner known as the Steilacoom Tribe of Indians (STI), located in Steilacoom, Wash., as an Indian tribe within the meaning of Federal law. The petitioner has 612 members.

Under 25 CFR Part 83, the regulations that govern the Federal Acknowledgment Process, failure by a petitioning group to meet seven mandatory criteria will result in the group not being acknowledged as an Indian tribe. The available evidence demonstrates that this petitioner does not meet four of the seven mandatory criteria as set forth in 25 CFR Part 83.7.

The STI claims to have descended as a group from the historical Steilacoom Indian tribe that occupied territory in the western part of Washington State. The STI claims its ancestors signed the Medicine Creek Treaty in 1854 and that its ancestors resided briefly on the reservations created by the treaty. The STI further contends that some of these Indians left the reservations, settled in "community pockets" in their traditional homelands, and formed an unbroken line of leadership and a continuous community existence to the present. The available evidence does not support these claims showing only that three of the STI members descend from individuals identified in historical documents as Steilacoom Indians. The evidence also did not demonstrate that the STI maintained a distinct community from historical times to the present, or that there was such a group that maintained political influence over its members.

The four criteria the petitioner does not meet are criteria 83.7(a), 83.7(b), 83.7(c) and 83.7(e).

Criterion 83.7(a) requires that external observers have identified the petitioner as an American Indian entity on a substantially continuous basis since 1900. The available evidence demonstrates that external observers identified the petitioner as an American Indian entity on a substantially continuous basis only since 1974.

Criterion 83.7(b) requires that a predominant portion of the petitioning group has comprised a distinct community since historical times. The available evidence does not demonstrate this.

Criterion 83.7(c) requires that the petitioning group has maintained political influence over its members as an autonomous entity since historical times. The available evidence does not demonstrate this.

Criterion 83.7(e) requires that a petitioner's members descend from a historical Indian tribe. Over 90 percent of the STI's 612 members documented that they are Indian descendants, but only three of them document descent from persons described as Steilacoom Indians in 19th and early 20th century documents. Most of the STI members descend from other Indians in the Pacific Northwest or from Métis people from the Red River Valley in Manitoba, Canada.

The three criteria the petitioner does meet are criteria 83.7(d), 83.7(f) and 83.7(g). Criterion 83.7(d) requires that the petitioner provide a copy of its governing document. Criterion 83.7(f) requires that the

petitioner’s membership be composed principally of persons who are not members of another Federally recognized tribe. Criterion 83.7(g) requires that the petitioner not be subject to legislation forbidding the Federal relationship.

This Final Determination follows a review of petitioner and public comments on the Department’s Proposed Finding issued on January 14, 2000. The Final Determination will become effective 90 days after its publication as a notice in the Federal Register unless any interested party requests reconsideration with the Interior Board of Indian Appeals (IBIA).

Copies of the Final Determination and the Federal Register notice will be posted on the Interior Department’s website at www.doi.gov.

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