Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Isabel Benemelis-Nicoli (202)208-7975
For Immediate Release: December 22, 2006
Print PDF

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Interior Associate Deputy Secretary James E. Cason today announced that the Department of the Interior has completed its review of the Environmental Analysis (EA) of the proposed Monticello Raceway Casino project submitted by the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe of New York. Cason has determined that, under the National Environmental Policy Act, the EA is sufficient and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. Cason has signed and the Bureau of Indian Affairs is issuing a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the project.

"The present action is narrow in scope and should not be regarded as suggesting a future commitment to take the subject land into trust or to approve a compact to conduct gaming on that property pursuant to Section 20 of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act," wrote Cason in a letter to the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe dated Dec. 21, 2006.

The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe already has an existing reservation of almost 15,000 acres of land in the state of New York, which is held in restricted fee status. The tribe has proposed that the United States take another 29.31 acres of land into trust for an approved casino project. The subject property is located in the Village of Monticello more than 450 miles from the reservation.

Cason further advises in his letter that the statutory, regulatory, and policy environment is changing with regard to Section 20 gaming applications. "We share the concerns that many have expressed with off-reservation gaming and so-called "reservation shopping." The Department will be reviewing the regulations that govern the processing of fee-into-trust applications (25 CFR Part 151). We anticipate changes to the rules that may result in fewer off-reservation properties being accepted into trust."

The Secretary of the Interior has authority under 25 CFR Part 151 to take land into trust for the benefit of federally recognized tribes. Copies of the signed FONSI statement and letters were sent to the St. Regis Mohawk tribal leadership and to Gov. Pataki on Dec. 21, 2006. The Interior Department will continue to work with the Tribe, representatives of local jurisdictions, and the public in the future consideration of the application.