



Five BIA Employees Receive Recognition

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For Immediate Release: January 26, 2006

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WASHINGTON -- Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton today paid tribute to the courageous men and women from the Department of the Interior who participated in the Gulf Coast Hurricane Relief effort last year. One hundred and twenty men and women representing thirteen departments and bureaus were chosen to represent the more than six thousand DOI employees who worked tirelessly to bring relief to the devastated citizens of the Gulf Coast Region. The Office of the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) had five employees, representing more than five hundred BIA employees, who received certificates of appreciation by Secretary Norton at a ceremony held at 1:00 pm in the Sydney Yates Auditorium at the Department's headquarters.

"I'm extremely proud of the way our BIA employees pulled together and made things happen in a positive way," said W. Patrick Ragsdale, Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. "Today we honor their initiative, courage and commitment to the task of helping others in their times of need."

The Gulf Coast Hurricane Recognition Recipients from the BIA that attended the ceremony were: John Philben, Phoenix, Ariz.; Stuart Ott, Herndon, Va.; Bruce Maytubby, Anadarko, Okla.; David Johnson, Anadarko, Okla.; and David Nicholas, Nashville, Tenn. Those unable to attend were: Erik LaRose, Phoenix, Ariz.; Jimmy Beb, Choctaw, Miss.; Tony Recker, Nashville, Tenn.; David Bodoni, Gallup, N.M.; and Steve Lafriniere, Mahanomen, Minn.

The BIA's Eastern Region, headquartered in Nashville, Tenn., and Choctaw Agency in Philadelphia, Miss., coordinated recovery efforts with tribal governments in the states of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. The Mississippi Choctaw, who saw the eye of Hurricane Katrina pass over them, were the hardest hit. BIA employees mobilized to arrange for fresh water to be trucked in from Arkansas, utilized agency road equipment to help clear debris from roadways, explored ways to bring in supplies of ice, fuel and food, and assigned law enforcement personnel to protect lives and property. The BIA Office of Law Enforcement

Services (OLES) provided a Mobile Command Vehicle and Emergency Response Task Force (ERT) to assist Choctaw police with their recovery efforts. BIA Law Enforcement officers patrolled some of the most devastated areas including Louisiana's St. Bernard Parish.

BIA forestry and firefighters were some of the first responders. They provided chainsaws and heavy equipment to clear fallen trees and other debris from the roads in order for trucks to bring in much-needed supplies to the region.

The Director of the BIA directly oversees the day-to-day activities of the agency that provides services to individual American Indians and Alaska Natives from the federally recognized tribes. The Director administers all laws governing non-education portions of Indian Affairs, provides leadership and direction for BIA employees, and oversees and monitors the work of the BIA regional offices, agencies

and field offices. The Director also shares authority and responsibility for the management of tribal and individual Indian trust funds with the Special Trustee for American Indians, and oversees the Bureau's Land Consolidation Center, the agency's nationwide program to consolidate fractionated interests in Indian lands.

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