Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON -- Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton and Acting Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Aurene Martin, a member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, say that a conference starting today at the University of Montana in Missoula will bring a "welcome" and needed forum for Native American perspectives on the Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Between 800 and 1,000 participants are expected today for "A Confluence of Cultures: Native Americans and the Expedition of Lewis and Clark," organized by the University of Montana and the Montana Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commission, scheduled to run from May 28 to 30. Interior Department bureaus including the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service are co-sponsoring the event. Faculty members and students from 33 tribal colleges and 44 other institutions of higher learning have been invited. About 240 Indian performers, presenters, and speakers are expected.

"The knowledge and good will of the tribes not only guided the Lewis and Clark Expedition, but saved its members from starvation and death from exposure," says Interior Secretary Norton. "The Bicentennial needs to give special recognition to the voices of Americans who already knew the land as their home."

"We welcome the efforts of conference sponsors to provide an exceptional forum for Native American perspectives on the Bicentennial," adds Assistant Secretary Aurene Martin, who oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which provides assistance to tribes and tribal colleges.

Norton notes that the Corps of Discovery II, an interagency museum-on-wheels traveling the nation, features a "Tent of Many Voices" in which the tribes and others are invited to give their viewpoints. The Corps of Discovery II is led by Gerard Baker, Superintendent of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and a Mandan-Hidatsa Indian.

The Department of the Interior published a special interagency issue of its magazine, People Land and Water, called "The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial: Many Voices - One Journey Join Us." The May 2003 magazine features articles by a number of Native American "voices" and will be distributed at the conference.

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