Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Acting Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Aurene M. Martin and Special Trustee for American Indians Ross O. Swimmer today announced the issuance of a new Departmental Manual (DM) that makes effective the reorganization of the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs (OAS/IA), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) within the Department of the Interior. This new Departmental Manual, which was signed by Secretary Gale Norton on April 21, 2003, reflects suggestions, proposals, and recommendations that were presented to her last year through the Joint Tribal Leaders/DOI Task Force on Trust Reform.

"We now have an organization that will enable us to provide services more efficiently and effectively than in the past," said Assistant Secretary Martin. "Our commitment is to enhancing the quality of life, promoting economic opportunity, and protecting and improving the trust assets of the tribes and individual American Indians and Alaska Natives whom we serve."

Special Trustee Swimmer concurred in these comments and added that the reorganization is "designed to bring greater accountability, more efficiency and enhanced beneficiary services to the Indian community. Many new staff positions have been created at the local level to enhance the delivery of services."

The new Departmental Manual describes responsibilities, delegated authorities, and organizational structures for the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians. Highlights include:

- New organizational charts for the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians;
- Updated descriptions of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs' responsibilities and authorities;
- Updated descriptions of the Office of the Special Trustee's responsibilities and authorities;
- The renaming of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Deputy Commissioner as Director;
- New descriptions of BIA Director and Deputy Director responsibilities and authorities;
- The establishment of the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, Deputy Assistant Secretary – Policy and Economic Development, and Deputy Assistant Secretary – Information Resources Management/Chief Information Officer (CIO) with descriptions of responsibilities and authorities;
- New chapters on delegated authorities;
- New chapters describing field operations and those BIA functions that now will report to the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, Deputy Assistant Secretary – Policy and Economic Development, Deputy Assistant Secretary –Management or Deputy Assistant Secretary – Information Resources Management/Chief Information Officer;
- Updated descriptions of the Bureau field organization;
- Updated list of field office locations;
- The addition of trust officers at local agencies and trust administrators at the regional level in OST to support trust operations; and

- The placement of chapters from the previous DM on Self-Governance, Audit and Evaluation, Office of American Indian Trust, Office of Trust Funds Management, Office of Trust Records, and Office of Trust Risk Management, along with new chapters describing authorities of the new Deputy Assistant Secretaries and other functions, within the new Departmental Manual.

As an example of the changes contained in the DM, the BIA's Branch of Acknowledgement and Research (BAR) has been renamed the Office of Federal Acknowledgment (OFA). It will now report to the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, a new position within the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs. Actual personnel changes will be phased in gradually over the next few months.

The Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs has responsibility for fulfilling the Department's trust responsibilities and promoting self-determination on behalf of the 562 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments. The Assistant Secretary also oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs, an agency with 10,500 employees nationwide, which is responsible for providing services to approximately 1.5 million individual American Indians and Alaska Natives from the federally recognized tribes.

The Special Trustee for American Indians is responsible for the oversight and coordination of the Department's efforts to reform its practices relating to the management and discharge of the Secretary's Indian trust responsibilities.

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