Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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(WASHINGTON, D.C.) The Bureau of Indian Affairs is a major sponsor of the American Indian/Alaska Native Tourism Association's 2001 American Indian Tourism Conference, which will take place Sept. 9-12 in Bismarck, N.D. Over 700 people representing the 558 federally recognized tribes in the United States as well as tribes from Canada are expected to attend the conference, which is the largest of its kind in the country. The theme for this year's event is "Preserving our past, sharing our future."

"We are proud to sponsor such an important conference," said Interior Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb. "We recognize that tourism can play a significant role in the local economies of tribes here in the U.S., and the Bureau of Indian Affairs wants to take a proactive approach in helping to develop it." Tourism also provides an opportunity to educate people about the many cultures represented by Indian nations, McCaleb noted.

Workshops and sessions will address cultural sensitivity, infrastructure development, state and federal participation, international marketing and other topics. The conference will emphasize developing the capacities of the federally recognized tribes to increase their share of the $541 billion U.S. tourism business, which, with a workforce of 18 million, is the country's leading service industry, according to the Travel Industry Association of America. Bismarck was selected as the host city because of its importance to the Lewis and Clark expedition, whose bicentennial will be celebrated next year.

"Co-sponsoring the tourism conference and working closely with the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial activities are part of the BIA's efforts to promote tourism as a viable component of a tribe's economic development plan," said Ed Hall, a Transportation Specialist who heads the Bureau's tourism program. "The conference is also an international event giving tribal representatives from the U.S. and Canada an opportunity to share ideas and information."

For many of the tribes in the U.S. one of the most critical barriers to tourism development is the lack of infrastructure, such as roads and utilities, on their reservations. "The Bureau will have a significant role to play in helping tribes develop the physical infrastructure they will need to accommodate tourists who come to their lands," McCaleb said. He added that many of the tourism-driven improvements also would improve the basic quality of life for tribal communities.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's new entertainment complex at its Prairie Knights Casino and Lodge will be the site of the conference's opening night reception. Other event activities include an Indian Market and Trade Show showcasing over 100 exhibitors and a Sacajawea/Lewis and Clark historical tour along the Missouri River. McCaleb oversees the BIA, a 176-year-old federal agency with almost 10,000 employees nationwide that provides services to, carries out its federal trust responsibilities for, and promotes the self-determination of the 558 federally recognized Tribal governments and approximately 1.4 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. The American Indian/Alaska Native Tourism Association is a national organization whose mission is to "facilitate a network of American Indian tourism interest to cooperatively identify cultural benefits, markets and tourism opportunities that will enhance Tribal business and economic development strategies." The BIA is a member of AI/ANTA. For more information on the American Indian Tourism Conference, call 2001 Host Tourism

Co-Chair Sandra Ann Poitra at 701-477-5495 or National Indian Tourism Co-Chair Gloria Cobb at 715-588-3324, or visit the conference web site at http://www.indiantourism.org