Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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One tribe's 22-year journey through the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) process for federal recognition ended this afternoon when Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Kevin Gover signed the final determination in favor of federal acknowledgement for the Chinook Indian Tribe/Chinook Nation of Washington State in a ceremony at the Department of the Interior's main building in Washington, D.C. "Today, we have the opportunity to address directly a historical injustice lasting many years," said Assistant Secretary Gover, "The Chinook rejoin the family of Tribal Nations acknowledged by the United States."

Present at the signing were Chinook Chairman Gary Johnson and a delegation of tribal council representatives and tribal members. "This is a great day for the Chinook people," said Chairman Johnson, "We are grateful to everyone who supported our recognition. Throw out the books that say the Chinook do not exist." Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Michael J. Anderson and BIA Deputy Commissioner M. Sharon Blackwell also signed the final determination, which was Assistant Secretary Gover's last official act on his final day with the Interior Department.

The Chinook Indian Tribe/Chinook Nation is located in western Washington State with significant portions of the approximately 2,000-member tribal population having lived along the shores of Willapa Bay and the Columbia River 25 to 45 miles to the south and southeast of Bay Center. The tribe first treatied with the United States in 1851. Despite suffering through decades of neglect by the federal government, tribal members maintained tribal and cultural traditions. In 1979, the tribe notified the BIA of its intent to submit a petition for federal recognition to the agency's Branch of Federal Acknowledgement and Research (BAR). Assistant Secretary Gover made his final determination based on documentary and interview evidence, which in 1997 formed the basis for a proposed finding not to acknowledge the Chinook Indian Tribe/Chinook Nation, and an analysis of information and comments received in response to the proposed finding from third parties and the tribe itself. He reached additional factual conclusions after conducting a review and analysis of the existing record in light of the additional evidence. A review of the 1997 proposed finding and information submitted by the Chinook Indian Tribe/Chinook Nation and third parties established that the tribe had met all seven mandatory criteria from first contact to the present under 1978 regulations on recognition. The Assistant Secretary also concluded the Chinook Indian Tribe/Chinook Nation had been acknowledged by Congress in 1925, thus meeting 1994 regulations requiring that a petitioner demonstrate historical continuity for the period commencing from the time of previous acknowledgement to the present. The Chinook Indian Tribe/Chinook Nation was therefore determined to have met the criteria under both the 1978 and 1994 regulations.

The final determination, which reverses the proposed finding, becomes effective 90 days after being published in the Federal Register. The full text of Assistant Secretary Gover's remarks can be accessed via the BIA's web site at http://www.doi.gov/bureau-indian-affairs.html.

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