Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Interior Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Eddie F. Brown today told a U.S. Senate committee that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is moving to implement a plan to resolve problems in management of the $2 billion Indian trust fund. "The plan will guide BIA to high levels of service excellence for our customers, the tribal and individual Indian trust account owners," Brown said in testimony prepared for the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs. Brown and BIA Deputy Commissioner David Matheson said that key elements for the strategic plan include four primary goals and 50-plus action items, the implementation of which has already begun. The four strategic goals are:

1. Collect, account for, invest, distribute and provide information on trust funds in an accurate and timely manner;
2. Resolve past accounting and distribution problems as they affect tribes and individual account holders;
3. Aid tribes and Individual Indian Money (IIM) account holders in achieving their self-determination, self-sufficiency and economic development goals to the extent consistent with BIA fiduciary responsibilities; and
4. Identify, correct or ameliorate to the extent possible, external deficiencies and inherent complexities that make trust fund accountability difficult.

Matheson said the so-count action plans cover the spectrum of deficiencies cited in oversight reviews of BIA's trust funds management operations. "Specific action plans cover implementation of the Chief Financial Officer's Act of 1990, BIA staffing, recruitment and training, reviews of Area/Agency operations, policy and procedures development, implementation of improved internal controls and improved systems operations, financial reporting and providing information to account holders, future systems development, and investments and management practices including self-determination initiatives for increased tribal involvement in management of the trust fund," Matheson said.

Brown said that consultation with the Inter Tribal Monitoring Association on Indian Trust Funds has contributed considerably to the long-term plans of strategic action. -"I believe the long, deliberate consultation to discuss trust fund management with the Association, Indian tribes, Congress, the Office of Management and Budget (0MB), and the General Accounting Office (GAO) has paid off in terms of the level of mutual understanding and the fresh ideas brought to the process," Brown said. "I am also pleased and encouraged that the Advisory Task Force on the Reorganization of BIA named by Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan more than a year ago agrees with the thrust of agency efforts to date as expressed in their resolution." Brown said that the 0MB has been very supportive of our efforts and has promised strong Administration support.