Media Contact: Steve Goldstein (O) 202/208-6416 (H) 202/887-5248
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Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan today directed implementation of short-term and long-range plans-to improve regulation of gaming on Indian reservations

"These actions are intended to assure that tribes can maintain gaming as a viable economic enterprise while implementing controls," Lujan said. "We are moving to assure adequate protection of the general public and tribal communities from undesirable elements of gaming, to develop better coordination between the Department of the Interior and the Department of Justice, to alleviate law enforcement risks involved with gaming and to coordinate responsibilities with the National Indian Gaming Commission."

Eddie F. Brown, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, has appointed Hilda Manuel as interim head of the Gaming Action Team to implement the plans ordered by Lujan. Manuel, an attorney and former tribal judge, has worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the past two years and presently is director of the Office of Tribal Government Services.

Brown said that the Gaming Action Team will include individuals skilled in law, accounting, gaming management, law enforcement and other areas key to gaming.

The action plans approved by Lujan were drawn up by a Task Force on Indian Gaming Management, appointed by the Secretary in December.

As part of the short-term plan, the team will work with tribes and contractors to make whatever corrective actions may be necessary to insure compliance with the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and Interior Department guidelines.

Lujan said that actions should be taken to bring tribes currently operating Class III (casino) gaming without tribal state compacts into compliance with the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. Where unauthorized games and operators are found, legal actions will be taken to halt operations. The team is to work with the Department of Justice to bring about criminal prosecution of crimes involving gaming.

An Indian Gaming Management Office within the Bureau of Indian Affairs will be established to oversee background checks, monitor gaming contractors, approve per capita plans for distribution of income from Indian gaming, handle tribal/state compact approvals, process off-reservation trust acquisitions, and coordinate transition of various functions and responsibilities as the National Indian Gaming Commission becomes fully operational. The commission, authorized by the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, is in the process of establishing regulations under which it will operate.

Lujan ordered the Solicitor of the Department and the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs to strengthen coordination with the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation in fulfilling the mandates of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.