



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Lovett 202/343-7445

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Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs Ken Smith today announced a reorganization of the BIA's administrative structure that will create a \$16 million annual saving and "move the Indian agency a long way toward its goal of making as much of its budget as possible available for funding of programs at the reservation level."

The reorganization consolidates the BIA's 12 area offices into five regional service centers located at Albuquerque, New Mexico; Anadarko, Oklahoma; Aberdeen, South Dakota; Phoenix, Arizona; and Portland, Oregon.

In addition, special program offices at Juneau, Alaska, and Window Rock Arizona, will serve the state of Alaska and the Navajo Reservation. These special offices will report directly to the BIA central office in Washington D.C., and not be under the jurisdiction of any regional center.

There will be field offices, reporting to the Aberdeen Center, at Billings Montana, and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The plan also reduces BIA's 12 area education offices to five regional centers -- located at the regional service centers -- and two special program education offices, located with the special program offices.

Smith said the reorganization of the Bureau is designed to reduce the cost of administering the Bureau's field programs; to restructure the field offices to provide improved technical service capability; and to improve the efficiency of implementing Bureau programs and services.

The regional service centers and the areas they will serve are: Southwest Center, Albuquerque, New Mexico: New Mexico, Colorado and western Utah.

Southern Center Anadarko, Oklahoma: Oklahoma.

Western Center, Phoenix, Arizona: Arizona, Nevada, southern Utah, and southern and central California.

Northwest Center, Portland, Oregon: Washington, Oregon, Idaho, the northern parts of California, western Montana, and the Metlakatla Reservation in southern Alaska.

North Central Center, Aberdeen, South Dakota: Eastern Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa and Kansas.

For programmatic purposes, those tribes formerly in the Eastern Area Office will be served from a technical assistance and service office in Washington, D.C., reporting to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations. Eastern area office states include New York, Maine, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina and Mississippi. For administrative purposes, such as computer services, the tribes in those states will be served by the Southern center.

Smith said the final number and selection of sites for the regional service centers came after he and his immediate staff and regional officials held extensive consultations with the tribes and after the work of task forces in each region had been studied and analyzed.

Smith said consultation with the approximately 500 tribal governments served by the Bureau was conducted by senior executive personnel appointed as provisional regional directors of the proposed offices. 11 In addition, the Bureau received about 275 written comments during that period from tribes, inter-tribal councils, members of Congress and interested individuals," he added.

The major changes from the proposed plan revealed in February are:

(1) elimination of the proposed Northeast regional service center through consolidation of the area previously served by the Minneapolis area office with the North Central region, and the administrative consolidation of the area previously served by the Eastern area office with the Southern region; (2) location of the North Central regional office in Aberdeen, rather than Rapid City; and (3) location of the Southern regional office in Anadarko, rather than Oklahoma City.

"There are a number of compelling reasons for the actions being taken to realign the Bureau's middle management structure," Smith said.

"Foremost is the impact of Public Law 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination Act, which has encouraged and strengthened tribal government participation in designing and contracting for the delivery of program services to the tribes," he said.

About 25 percent of the operation of Indian programs was performed under self-determination contracts by FY 1981. Smith said that percentage will continue to increase.

"The enactment of Public Law 95-561, the Indian Education Act, continued the emphasis on Indian involvement by creating school boards and implementing a system of employing teachers through contracts rather than as direct Bureau staff," he added.

In school year 1981-82, almost 2,000 out of a total of 7,400 Bureau educators were employed under this system.

"We expect the number of contract teachers to increase by as much as 1,000 in the 1982-83 school year," Smith said.

A third reason noted by Smith was Public Law 92-203, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which is limiting the Bureau's responsibility for Alaska programs.

"For example," Smith said, "Certain programs in Alaska such as general assistance and education have been or are projected to be delivered in the future by the State."

The Bureau also anticipates a continued increase in various BIA programs contracted to Native villages and organizations.

Smith said the total numbers of employees to be in each of the locations are still indeterminate. Final decisions will be made on the staffing patterns needed to fulfill the responsibilities the BIA has at each service center as implementation plans go forward. "But we are confident that the reduction in total Federal employees in the area and central offices will be 372 as we originally planned," he added.

"This is my response to the request that I have heard repeatedly from tribal leaders throughout my travels in Indian Country to reduce the overhead costs of operating the Bureau," Smith said. Estimates of the onetime costs of carrying out the reorganization are in the neighborhood of \$7 million.

In the realignment of the Bureau's education offices, the regional education centers and the Navajo special program office will be headed by an assistant director for education with line authority and responsibility for education activities in the regions. Assistant director positions were formerly located in the central office.

"The plan complies with the mandates of Public Law 95-561 which stresses local community control of Indian schools under professional educators," Smith pointed out.

He said the Bureau is now preparing detailed organizational changes in accordance with Department procedures and anticipates transfer of authorities from the area office structure to the regional organization structure by October 1, 1982.

"Final close down of the existing area offices and disposition of files, records, associated office equipment, etc., is expected to be completed prior to October 1, 1983," Smith said.

The regional implementation is phased to overlap the phase out of current area structure so that day-to-day business continues effectively, and service to tribes is not impaired by the realignment process.

Smith said that budget reprogramming authority has been requested from appropriate committees in Congress in order to carry out the reorganization prior to the beginning of FY 1983.

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BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS REGIONAL BOUNDARIES

