Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Final regulations governing the procedures by which an Indian group would be acknowledged to be an Indian tribe are being published in the Federal Register Interior Assistant Secretary Forrest Gerard announced today.

The increased number of Indian groups requesting that the Secretary of the Interior officially acknowledge them as Indian tribes has necessitated the development of uniform procedures to be followed.

The purpose of the regulations is to facilitate the official recognition of the American Indian tribal groups which have maintained their political, ethnic and cultural integrity despite the absence of any formal action by the Federal Government to acknowledge or implement a Federal relationship.

Under the regulations as proposed, the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs would acknowledge only the Indian tribes whose members and their ancestor existed in tribal relations since aboriginal times and have retained some aspects of their aboriginal sovereignty.

With these requirements, not every group of Indian people living in the same region or area would necessarily constitute a tribe, though they might be members of a club, corporation or other organization. Failure to be acknowledged pursuant to these regulations does not constitute a denial that the group is Indian. It means these groups do not have the characteristics necessary for the Secretary to acknowledge them as existing as an Indian tribe entitles to rights and services as such