Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Program encourages informed decision-making by landowners considering whether to accept a voluntary purchase offer

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WASHINGTON – In June and July 2019, the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations mailed more than $140 million in purchase offers to more than 18,000 owners of fractional land interests at the Navajo Nation. **The deadline for landowners to return their voluntary purchase offers is either August 30, 2019, or September 30, 2019, depending on the offer cover letter date**.

Due to the large number of fractional land interests at the Navajo Nation, the Buy-Back Program sent purchase offers to landowners in two different mailing waves. The two mailing waves are based on various land areas across the Navajo Reservation. Individuals may own, and receive offers for, interests in land in multiple land areas.

Wave 1. The first wave of offers is for interests in certain lands in New Mexico with a corresponding land area code (LAC) of 791. These offers have a cover letter date of July 1, 2019. Landowners with fractional interests in LAC 791 have until **August 30, 2019**, to consider and return accepted offers in the pre-paid postage envelopes provided.

Wave 2. The second wave of offers has a cover letter date of August 1, 2019, and was sent to Navajo Nation landowners for interests at the following LACs: 722 (Ramah), 723 (Alamo), 724 (To'hajiilee), 790 (Arizona), and 792 (Utah). Landowners who received offers for interests owned in one or more of these five LACs have until **September 30, 2019**, to consider and return accepted offers in the pre-paid postage envelopes provided.

"We are proud of the initial Buy-Back Program implementation at the Navajo Nation. The Program achieved significant results and transferred more than 155,000 equivalent acres of land to the Navajo Nation," **said Principal Deputy Special Trustee Jerry Gidner**. "We must continue our government-to-government collaboration to make the current round of implementation a success, while also ensuring that landowners understand their options, and have access to the information they need for an informed decision."

Various informational tools are available to landowners, who are encouraged to think strategically about their options and carefully consider how to use the funds they receive from selling their land. The Program's website includes detailed frequently asked questions, a schedule of upcoming outreach events, and additional information to help individuals make informed decisions about their land.

Landowners are encouraged to call the Trust Beneficiary Call Center (Call Center) at **888-678-6836** or visit their local Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) office to ensure that their address on file is current, ask questions about their land or purchase offers, and request a copy of the appraisal completed for their land.

Addresses Needed for Some Landowners. Nearly 1,700 Navajo Nation landowners do not currently have an up-to-date address on file with OST and, thus, the Program cannot mail them an offer package. To receive an offer package in the mail, landowners must contact the Call Center or OST by the following dates:

- August 23, 2019: landowners with interests in LAC 791; and
- September 23, 2019: landowners with interests in LACs 722, 723, 724, 790, and 792.

Overall Program Progress. The Buy-Back Program implements the land consolidation component of the *Cobell* Settlement, which provided $1.9 billion to consolidate fractional interests in trust or restricted land within a 10-year period set to expire in November 2022. As of 8/20, approximately $285 million remain, comprised of $156 million in the land purchase portion of the fund and $129 million in the implementation portion of the fund.

Since the Program began making offers in December 2013, more than 874,400 fractional interests have been transferred to tribal governments, which represents 35 percent of the total fractional interests in 2013 at the 52 locations where Program implementation has occurred and the equivalent of 2.5 million acres of land. As a result of the Buy-Back Program, tribal ownership now exceeds 50 percent in 17,300 more tracts of land (representing an increase of more than 142 percent for the locations where implementation has occurred), facilitating the exercise of tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

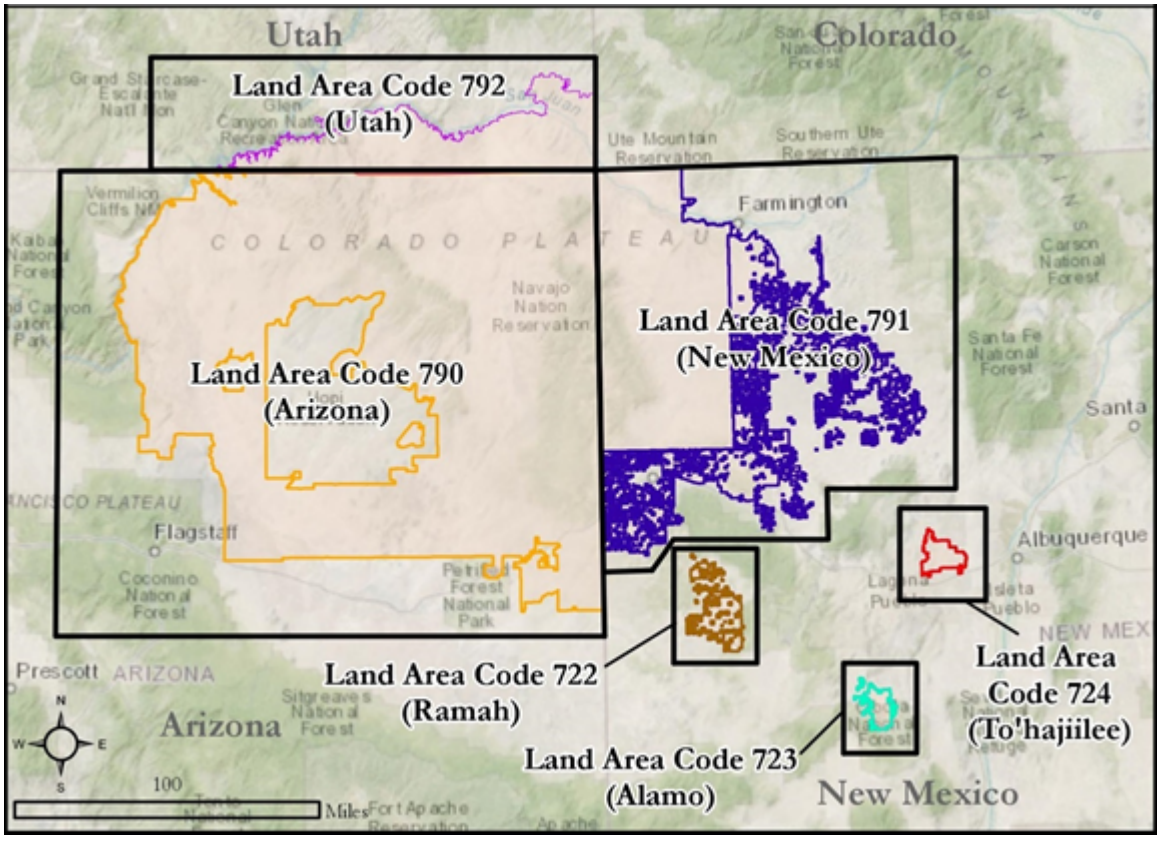
Interests consolidated through the Buy-Back Program are restored to tribal trust ownership. Returning fractionated lands to tribes in trust has the potential to improve tribal community resources by increasing home site locations, improving transportation routes, spurring economic development, easing approval for infrastructure and community projects, and preserving traditional cultural or ceremonial sites.

The 2019 appropriations process realigned the Land Buy-Back Program from the Office of the Secretary to OST. The realignment of the Buy-Back Program institutionalizes best practices to fulfill the Department’s fiduciary duties. Further, it strengthens coordination efforts and opportunities to streamline processes.

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Utah
Colorado
Land Area Code 792
(Utah)
Land Area Code 790
(Arizona)
Land Area Code 791
(New Mexico)
Land Area Code 722
(Ramah)
Land Area Code 723
(Alamo)
Land Area
Code 724
(To'hajiilee)
Farmington
Albuquerque
Santa
Flagstaff
Prescott
ARIZONA
Arizona
New Mexico
COLORADO PLATEAU
Navajo
Nation
Reservation
Ute Mountain
Reservation
Southern Ute
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Coconino
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Kaibab
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