



DOI decision is first under its revised rules for taking land in trust for federally recognized tribes in Alaska

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WASHINGTON - Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Lawrence S. Roberts, who leads the Office of the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs, today announced the Department's decision to place a 1.08-acre land parcel owned by the Craig Tribal Association, a federally recognized tribe headquartered in the City of Craig, Alaska, into federal Indian trust status. The decision is the first under the Department's revised rule for taking tribal land into trust in Alaska.

"The journey to this decision has been a long one. Today, the federally recognized tribes in Alaska have the same opportunity as those in the Lower 48 states to maintain a permanent homeland for themselves," Roberts said. "The decision to place the Craig Tribal Association's land into trust reflects the policies of tribal self-determination and self-governance through the restoration of tribal homelands that will benefit its current and future generations of tribal members. I congratulate the Craig Tribal Association leadership on their achievement. I also commend the State of Alaska and the City of Craig for their comments on the land-into-trust application. Their approach, much like other state and local governments, is another important example of tribes, states and local governments working together in a government-to-government relationship to address concerns so that they may better serves their collective communities."

Congress amended the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) in 1936 so that, among other things, tribes in Alaska would be treated similarly to tribes in the Lower 48 states. For decades afterward, the Department accepted lands into trust for a few Alaska tribes. However, in 1980 the Department changed course and did not allow Alaska tribes to submit applications - a regulatory prohibition that became known as the "Alaska exception" to the Department's land-into-trust regulations. That misguided approach was corrected under the Obama Administration with the promulgation of a revised rule that removed the Alaska exception.

"The elimination of the 'Alaska exception' to the Bureau of Indian Affairs' land-into-trust regulations has rectified an error that has for far too long treated Alaska tribes differently in the restoration of tribal homelands," said BIA Director Weldon "Bruce" Loudermilk. "I want to thank the Office of Trust Services staff in the BIA's Alaska Regional Office and the staff across the Department for their hard work on this complex matter. I also want to add my congratulations to the Craig Tribal Association leaders on the restoration of a small part of their homeland."

Craig Tribal Association is organized under the IRA with a constitution and by-laws approved by the Secretary of the Interior on July 13, 1938 and ratified by its members on October 8, 1938. The Association is included on the Federal Register notice of Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible To Receive Services From the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, the official list of all federally recognized tribes published annually by the BIA.

Craig Tribal Association members and their ancestors, who are primarily Tlingit Shangukeidi and Haida Kaigani, have utilized the areas in and around what is now the City of Craig as their traditional homeland since time immemorial. Craig, or Shaanseet as it is known by the tribe, was historically a seasonal herring roe and fish camp site for the Tlingit Shangukeidi and Haida Kaigani. In 1908, a cannery and cold storage facility was established in present day Craig with help from the local Haida people.

After purchasing the property from an individual landowner in 1996, the Association began development and construction of its community building. Prior to the tribe's ownership, the property was undeveloped forested land with no permanent structures. It now uses the property for government offices, and leases space that generates funds to support tribal services.

Although the property can still be used by the tribe for its government offices, community service programs, and other tribal needs, the land-into-trust decision does not make the parcel eligible for gaming under federal law. And, while providing the community with another partner in the form of the BIA to promote safety and law enforcement, the land's new status does not in any way impact the State of Alaska's law enforcement authority under Public Law 280. The decision also does not impact valid existing rights-of-way or easements on the property, nor does it impact the subsurface mineral owner's rights.

The Secretary of the Interior is authorized by the IRA to acquire land into trust for federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes. Lands held in federal Indian trust status, which cannot be sold, alienated or transferred to non-Indians or non-Natives, benefit their tribal owners who are eligible for federal program assistance for business development, housing, and environmental and cultural protection. Typical uses of trust land include governmental operations, cultural activities, agricultural/forestry projects, housing, economic development, social and community services, and health care and educational facilities.

The Obama Administration is committed to the restoration of tribal homelands. When Secretary Jewell took office, she set a goal to restore at least 500,000 acres of land into trust for tribes by the end of the Administration. As of today, Indian Affairs has processed more than 2,265 individual trust applications and restored more than 570,799 acres of land into trust since 2009.

The Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs oversees the BIA, whose offices directly administer or fund tribally based infrastructure, economic development, law enforcement and justice, social services (including child welfare), tribal governance, and trust land and natural and energy resources management programs for the nation's federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes. The Bureau carries out its responsibilities in the management of federal Indian trust lands, which includes the land-into-trust process, through the Office of Trust Services.

<https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/opa/online-press-release/interior-approves-craig-tribal-associations-land-trust-application>