Seeks input from tribal leaders, landowners to help determine sequence of next locations

Media Contact: Jessica Kershaw, Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov
For Immediate Release: November 4, 2015
Print PDF

WASHINGTON – The Department of the Interior today released the 2015 Status Report for the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations (Program), which summarizes its implementation to date and significant economic impact in Indian Country. Since 2013, the Buy-Back Program has paid nearly $715 million to landowners and restored the equivalent of approximately 1.5 million acres of land to tribal governments.

In addition to releasing the Status Report, the Program is launching a two-part Planning Initiative to help determine its next implementation schedule for 2017 and beyond.

The first part seeks input from tribal governments who are interested in participating in the Program. Eligible tribal governments not already scheduled for implementation are invited to formally indicate their interest in participating in the Program no later than March 11, 2016. More information is available to tribal leaders at: www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/tribes. The second part is a nationwide recruitment drive to further identify and engage landowners who are interested in learning more about this opportunity.

“The Buy-Back Program is another excellent example of this Administration’s commitment to provide more economic, social and cultural opportunities for landowners, their families, and tribal communities for the benefit of generations to come,” said Deputy Secretary Michael L. Connor. “The interest in the Program across Indian Country has been incredible and momentum is building. Already more than 66,000 individuals have had the opportunity to consider purchase offers for their fractional land interests. We are committed to collaborating with tribal governments to offer this opportunity to as many individuals as we can within the Program’s ten year timeframe.”

The Buy-Back Program implements the land consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement, which provided $1.9 billion to purchase fractional interests in trust or restricted land from willing landowners at fair market value. The Program is authorized by Congress through 2022.

For the first time, the Program’s Status Report includes the findings of an economic impact study. According to the Department’s Office of Policy Analysis, cumulative Program payments to landowners as of September 2015 have contributed an estimated $752 million to gross domestic product, $1.4 billion in the output of goods and services, and supported about 9,000 jobs nationwide.

“This Program is about putting resources back into Indian Country,” said Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Kevin Washburn. “The moment to get involved in this opportunity is right now. We have only a few short years in which to implement this important Program, and we are determined to do everything we can to provide interested tribal governments and landowners the chance to participate. This is an

opportunity we cannot take for granted."

Informed by early planning activities and its open solicitation in 2013-2014, the Department identified 42 locations where land consolidation activities – such as planning, outreach, mapping, mineral evaluations, appraisals or acquisitions – have either already occurred or are expected to take place through the middle of 2017. These locations represented 83 percent of all outstanding fractional interests across Indian Country.

There are about 245,000 owners of nearly three million fractional interests across Indian Country who are eligible to participate in the Program. Many see little or no economic benefit from what are often small, undivided interests in lands that cannot be utilized due to their highly fractionated state.

Interested landowners should call the Trust Beneficiary Call Center (Call Center) at 888-678- 6836 to register their interest and confirm contact information. Registration in no way commits a landowner to sell their land nor does it guarantee that an offer will be received; it merely identifies the landowner's interest in receiving an offer.

Individuals can contact the Call Center or visit their local Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) or Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) office to learn more about their land and their options – including how the Program works. The Call Center and local OST staff can also help landowners think strategically about how to use funds they may receive through the Program.

To further help individuals make informed decisions about their land, extensive frequently asked questions and answers are also online at: www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/landowners/upload/Frequently-Asked-Questions.
