Builds on Administration initiative to help tribal leaders restore American Indian homelands

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WASHINGTON – Acting Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Lawrence S. Roberts announced today that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has improved its Fee-to-Trust Handbook to reduce the processing time for requests from federally recognized tribes to have land taken into trust for their benefit and proclamations that declare the lands are part of their tribal reservations. Under the revised guidance, these requests may now be submitted simultaneously.

"After hearing from tribal leaders, we have taken another step in reducing lengthy and burdensome processes that hinder tribal governments in more fully utilizing their lands for the betterment of their people," Roberts said. "The BIA's revisions to its Fee-to-Trust Handbook provide tribes with greater flexibility in submitting land-into-trust and reservation proclamation requests while reducing the time spent to process them."

"This effort is part of President Obama's commitment to work with tribal leaders to restore tribal homelands," Roberts continued. "Since 2009, we have restored 416,000 acres to tribal ownership and we anticipate reaching the Administration's goal of restoring half a million acres."

The Handbook revisions include allowing a tribal government to combine its applications for requesting a land parcel be put into trust status (from fee simple ownership) and having a reservation proclamation issued for it. Previously, a requesting tribe would have to wait until the land is in trust before submitting a reservation proclamation request. The revised Handbook also provides guidance to BIA employees for processing simultaneous fee-to-trust and reservation proclamation requests.

The revisions also provide guidance on processing reservation proclamations where land has already been acquired in trust. A proclamation will not be finalized until the underlying land parcel has been taken into trust. The revised sections are 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 of the Handbook.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs can issue reservation proclamations under authority delegated by the Secretary of the Interior and in accordance with the Act of June 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984; 25 USC 467). Lands proclaimed reservations are for the exclusive use of Indians who are entitled to reside on them by enrollment or tribal membership. The BIA publishes reservation proclamations in the Federal Register.

The Acting Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs oversees the BIA, which is headed by a director who is responsible for managing day-to-day operations through four offices – Indian Services, Justice Services, Trust Services and Field Operations. These offices directly administer or fund tribally based infrastructure, law enforcement, social services (including child welfare), tribal governance, natural and energy resources, and trust management programs for the nation's federally recognized American

Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages through 12 regional offices and 81 agencies.

The Office of Trust Services Division of Real Estate Services administers the fee-to-trust regulations at 25 CFR Part 151 and reservation proclamations under the Act of June 18, 1934 (48 Stat. 984; 25 USC 467). For more information about the Division of Real Estate Services, visit http://www.indianaffairs.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OTS/RealEstate/index.htm.