Infrastructure easements, land leasing efficiency, and market improvements part of package to strengthen Tribal self-determination and create jobs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – As part of President Obama's commitment to support tribal self-governance and self-determination, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today announced a package of regulatory initiatives intended to help tribal leaders to spur investment opportunities and economic development in Indian Country.

Highlighted by the President during his historic visit to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe last week, the Department's actions will help remove regulatory barriers to infrastructure and energy development in Indian Country; increase tribal community access to expanded, high-speed Internet resources via broadband; eliminate leasing impediments to land development; and support the growth of new markets for Native American and Alaska Native businesses.

"Over the 14 months on the job, I've had the great privilege of visiting just as many tribal reservations," said **Secretary Jewell, who chairs the White House Council on Native American Affairs**. "Last week, on the heels of the President's visit to Indian Country, I joined Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Chairman David Archambault on a tour of his tribal lands. As Secretary, I have seen first-hand both economic success stories and the dramatic challenges tribes still face to generate employment and develop infrastructure within Indian Country."

Jewell further said, "While some tribes are experiencing economic progress in recent years, many others continue to face formidable economic hardship. Providing greater deference to tribes under the principles of self-determination and improving our federal regulations to meet the needs of the 21st century means we can help remove some of these barriers to economic development on tribal lands and lay a solid foundation for economic development as well as improve the quality of life for American Indians and Alaska Natives in their homelands."

The package of Interior regulatory initiatives includes:

Facilitating Indian Country Infrastructure Development

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is proposing new regulations for issuing "right-of-way" approvals on Indian land for all purposes. The rule would modernize and streamline the process for obtaining BIA approval for infrastructure development, providing tribal leaders, private companies, utility firms and energy developers greater certainty when designing or implementing infrastructure, including expanded Internet capacity through broadband access, transmission lines, and water, road and energy projects. The new regulations propose strict timelines for BIA approval of all requests; eliminate the

need for BIA approval of pre-development surveys, and limit the situations in which BIA may disapprove a right-of-way, all in an effort to provide faster approvals of right-of-way applications, facilitating economic development and greater deference to tribal priorities.

Removing Barriers to Land Development through Increased Tribal Self-governance

The BIA will conduct a series of training sessions to help tribal leaders implement the Helping Expedite & Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership (HEARTH) Act. When a tribal business needs to build a factory or a family wants to purchase a new home on a reservation, the lease generally requires BIA approval. Since 2012, however, the HEARTH Act provides tribes the opportunity to establish and enforce their own land leasing regulations in order to expedite the process for long-term leasing of tribal trust lands for residential, business, renewable energy and other purposes. Twenty-one tribes have submitted proposals to assume leasing responsibilities, and 12 have already received approvals for their regulations. The new BIA training supports tribal self-governance by helping to increase the number of tribes able to control leases on their land without BIA approval. This builds on Interior's progress in strengthening tribal control over tribal resources.

Supporting the Growth of New Markets for Native American and Alaska Native Small Businesses

Interior's Indian Affairs bureaus and offices will increase federal procurement opportunities by issuing a new directive improving implementation of the Buy Indian Act and increasing Indian Affairs' procurement purchases from Native American-owned small businesses by 10 percent. The Buy Indian Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to set aside certain qualifying acquisitions for American Indian-and Alaska Native-owned and controlled small businesses. These purchasing contracts issued by Indian Affairs offices and the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education will help increase economic activity and provide greater employment opportunities in Indian Country. "Underlying these initiatives is the Administration's firm belief that tribal leaders must have a seat at the table," **said Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Kevin Washburn**. "These initiatives we are announcing are part of a coordinated federal effort outlined by the President that builds on the significant progress this Administration has made in partnering with tribes on a nation-to-nation basis to promote prosperous and resilient communities."