Dry Creek Rancheria, Jamestown S'Klallam, Mohegan, and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes join eight others already cleared to process economic development leases without BIA approval

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: April 10, 2014
Print PDF

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn today approved leasing regulations submitted by four federally recognized tribes, restoring their authority to control the leasing of their trust lands and promoting their self-determination and economic development. This streamlined process for restoring tribal leasing authority is consistent with the objectives of the Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership Act, or HEARTH Act.

"Thanks to the HEARTH Act, more tribes have been empowered to take over leasing on their lands," Assistant Secretary Washburn said. "Tribal governments are the drivers of economic self-sufficiency and prosperity on their reservations and in their communities. The HEARTH Act restores their ability to directly control how their lands can and should be used for the good of their people, now and in the future."

The four tribes, submitted requests for Secretarial approval of their leasing regulations, are: Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians in California, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe in Washington State, Mohegan Indian Tribe of Connecticut, and Wichita and Affiliated Tribes in Oklahoma. Each tribe plans to authorize leases for general economic development. The HEARTH Act was signed by President Obama in July 2012. It restores the authority of federally recognized tribes to develop and implement their own laws governing long-term leasing of federal Indian trust lands for residential, business, renewable energy and other purposes, which greatly expedites the approval of leases for homes and small businesses in Indian Country. Upon one-time approval of its regulations by the Department of the Interior, a tribe may process land leases without having to first gain approval from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

The Assistant Secretary's action brings to 12 the number of tribes who have had their tribal leasing regulations approved under the Act. The others are: Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, California (Feb. 1, 2013); Pueblo of Sandia, New Mexico (March 14, 2013); Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, Michigan (April 11, 2013); Ak-Chin Indian Community; California (Nov. 10, 2013); Santa Rosa Band of Cahuilla Indians, California (Nov. 10, 2013); Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Oklahoma (Nov. 25, 2013); Ewiiaapaayp Band of Kumeyaay Indians, California (Dec. 10, 2013); and Kaw Nation, Oklahoma (Dec. 13, 2013).

In November 2012, the Department announced new regulations resulting from a comprehensive reform of the BIA's antiquated regulations governing its process for approving surface leases on lands held in trust by the Federal Government for Indian tribes and individuals. As trustee, Interior manages about 56 million surface acres in Indian Country.

The new regulations streamlined the leasing approval process on Indian land, spurring increased homeownership and expediting business and commercial development, including renewable energy projects.

The 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, 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 85 agencies.