Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: January 24, 2014
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WASHINGTON, DC – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn today approved a request by the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria to acquire 626 acres in trust in Butte County, California, near the City of Chico for gaming purposes.

The Mechoopda Tribe will construct and operate a modest gaming facility on 91 acres of the site. The project is estimated to create 214 full-time jobs. "The Mechoopda Tribe has pursued this initiative for more than a decade," Washburn said. "The acquisition of the land into trust for the purpose of establishing a class III gaming establishment will result in substantial financial benefits to the Tribe and help stimulate economic development."

Section 465 of the Indian Reorganization Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to acquire land in trust for Indian tribes. Pursuant to Section 2719 of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, (IGRA), the Secretary can allow gaming on trust land if it is determined that the property to be acquired in trust qualifies as "restored lands for an Indian tribe that is restored to federal recognition."

The Mechoopda Tribe had an historical presence in the area both before and after European arrival, but the Tribe is limited in its ability to acquire land on its former Chico Rancheria. Chico State University now owns and has developed much of the former Chico Rancheria lands, rendering those lands unsuitable for reacquisition by the Tribe.

The lands to be acquired are located only 10 miles from the Tribe's former Rancheria, and are located within the reservation boundaries that would have been established by an 1851 Treaty with the United States. "The trust acquisition of these lands will enable the Tribe to make its own decisions regarding its future, thus enjoying the benefits of tribal self-determination," Washburn said.

The Department of the Interior approved the Tribe's first application for land into trust in 2008. This decision was challenged in federal court and ultimately remanded by the court to the Department of the Interior for reconsideration.

In reaching today's decision, the Department conducted a thorough review of the Tribe's history and application, and determined that the lands meet the "restored lands exception" of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and the Department's implementing regulations, and that the Department is authorized to acquire the proposed lands in trust pursuant to the Indian Reorganization Act.

The Assistant Secretary's decision on Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria land-into-trust request is available online at https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/oig.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs has responsibility for fulfilling the Interior Department's trust responsibilities and promoting self-determination on behalf of the 566 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments. The Assistant Secretary also oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is responsible for providing services to 1.9 million individual American Indians and Alaska Natives from the federally recognized tribes, and the Office of Indian Gaming, which reviews

land-into-trust for gaming applications.