Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, DC – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn today issued proposed findings for two petitioners under the Federal Acknowledgment Process. The decisions include a proposed finding to acknowledge the petitioner known as the Pamunkey Indian Tribe (Petitioner #323) as a federally recognized Indian Tribe, and a proposed finding to decline acknowledgment for the petitioner known as the Meherrin Indian Tribe of North Carolina (Petitioner #119b).

Today's announcements begin a public comment period whereby individuals or organizations may submit arguments or evidence on the two proposed findings before the Department of the Interior issues final determinations.

The Pamunkey petitioner, located in Virginia, was found to have met all seven mandatory criteria for Federal acknowledgment as set forth in 25 CFR Part 83.7. Specifically, the Pamunkey petitioner has: continuously identified as an American Indian entity since 1900; has existed as a distinct community and maintained political influence over its members since historical times; has provided governing documents describing its governance procedures and membership criteria; has also provided a list of its current members who descend from an historical Indian tribe and who are not also members of another federally recognized tribe; and is not subject to congressional legislation that has expressly terminated or forbidden the federal relationship.

The petitioner has occupied a land base in southeastern King William County, Virginia - shown on a 1770 map as "Indian Town" - since the Colonial Era in the 1600s and exists today as a state Indian reservation. The Pamunkey petitioner has a current membership of 203 individuals and elects its own leaders.

The Meherrin petitioner, known as Petitioner #119b, did not submit evidence sufficient to satisfy criterion 83.7(e) which requires that its members descend from an historical Indian tribe or tribes that combined and functioned as a single autonomous political entity. Accordingly, the Department proposes to decline federal acknowledgment to Petitioner #119b.

In 1990, the Meherrin Indian Tribe organization petitioned for Federal acknowledgment as Petitioner #119. A subsequent split occurred of that Petitioner, resulting in two separate petitioners, Petitioner #119a and Petitioner #119b. In 1995, Petitioner #119b submitted its own petition for acknowledgment.

As provided by 25 CFR Part 83.10(i), the petitioner or any individual or organization wishing to support or challenge today's two proposed findings shall have 180 days after its publication in the Federal Register to submit arguments and evidence to rebut or support before any final determination is issued. After the 180-day comment period, the petitioner will have an additional 60 days to respond to the comments from third parties. After the response period closes, the Department will begin work on a final determination for this petitioner.

To view the proposed findings and Federal Register notices, visit the Indian Affairs website at https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/ofa/recent-acknowledgment-actions.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs has responsibility for fulfilling the Interior Department's trust responsibilities and promoting self-determination on behalf of the 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 approximately 1.9 million individual American Indians and Alaska Natives from the federally recognized tribes, and the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, which administers the Federal Acknowledgment Process.