# Willing Sellers Have 45 Days to Respond in Voluntary Land Buy-Back Program

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**WASHINGTON, DC** – Continuing the momentum of the Department of the Interior's Land BuyBack Program for Tribal Nations (Buy-Back Program), Deputy Secretary Mike Connor today announced that more than $34 million in additional purchase offers have been sent to almost 11,000 landowners with fractional interests at the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Interested sellers have 45 days – **until May 16, 2015** – to return accepted offers in the pre-paid postage envelops provided.

This second round of offers at one of Indian Country's most fractionated locations was prompted by the enthusiasm generated by the Program and will give landowners an additional opportunity to unlock thousands of acres of resources for the beneficial use of the tribe. In the initial round during the summer of 2014, the Department sent nearly $50 million in purchase offers to more than 11,000 landowners with fractional interests at the reservation.

"The success of this Program is a vital component of this Administration's commitment to restoring tribal homelands and remedying the harms caused by the repudiated allotment policy," said Deputy Secretary Connor. "Consolidating and returning these lands to tribes in trust have enormous potential to improve tribal community resources by increasing home site locations, improving transportation routes, spurring tribal economic development, and preserving traditional cultural or ceremonial sites."

There are about 245,000 owners of nearly three million fractional interests, spanning 150 American Indian reservations, who are eligible to participate in the Buy-Back Program. Many see little or no economic benefit from what are often very small, undivided interests in lands that cannot be utilized due to their highly fractionated state.

The Buy-Back Program implements the land consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement, which provided $1.9 billion to purchase fractional interests in trust or restricted land from willing sellers at fair market value within 10 years. Consolidated interests are immediately restored to tribal trust ownership for uses benefiting the reservation community and tribal members.

Thus far the Buy-Back Program has paid more than $360 million to individual landowners and has restored the equivalent of almost 560,000 acres of land to tribal governments.

Offers are also currently pending at:

- Umatilla Indian Reservation (deadline: March 30)
- Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (deadline: March 31)
- Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (deadline: April 20)

Individuals who choose to sell their interests receive payments directly into their Individual Indian

Money (IIM) accounts. In addition to receiving fair market value for their land based on objective appraisals, sellers also receive a base payment of $75 per offer, regardless of the value of the land.

Sales of land interests will also result in up to $60 million in contributions to the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund. This contribution by Interior is in addition to the amounts paid to individual sellers, so it will not reduce the amount landowners receive for their interests.

The Department has announced 42 locations where land consolidation activities such as planning, outreach, mapping, mineral evaluations, appraisals or acquisitions are expected to take place through the middle of 2017. These communities represent 83 percent of all outstanding fractional interests across Indian Country.

To learn more about the Program, more than 150 tribal leaders and landowners joined Interior officials at the 2015 Listening Session last week in Arizona. Written comments are encouraged and must be received by April 20, 2015. More information is available via the Federal Register.

Landowners with fractional interests can contact the Trust Beneficiary Call Center at (888) 678- 6836 with questions or to register their information. Individuals can also visit their local Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) or Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) office, or find more information at: www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/landowners.

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