Majority of Non-Gaming Trust Applications are Vital to Building Tribal Self-Determination Through Self-Sufficiency

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WASHINGTON – Secretary Ken Salazar has laid out his vision that restoration of tribal lands is key to Interior's strategy of empowering tribes and that there must be an improved land-into-trust process for non-gaming applications, Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk said today.

"We want to continue the rebuilding of strong relationships with tribal governments that began at the Tribal Nations Conference hosted by President Obama last November," Echo Hawk said. "Tribal self-determination through self-sufficiency rests on the restoration and protection of tribal homelands, and that is key to the Department's strategy of empowerment for Indian tribes. To achieve that, we must have, and we will have, a land-into-trust process that is transparent, orderly, lawful and timely."

The Secretary's views are outlined in a memorandum to the Assistant Secretary dated June 18, 2010.

The Secretary of the Interior's authority to take land into trust is the primary means to help restore and protect homelands of the nation's federally recognized tribes. From the allotment period of 1887 to 1934 and the Termination Era of the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. Government removed over 90 million acres of tribal lands. To date, nine million acres of tribal lands have been reacquired and taken into trust, mostly within the bounds of existing reservations.

The vast majority of land-into-trust applications processed by the Department are for tribal self-determination purposes such as providing housing, health care and education for tribal members and for supporting agricultural, energy and non-gaming economic development. Of the more than 1,900 trust land applications currently pending before the Bureau of Indian Affairs, over 95 percent are for non-gaming purposes.

In accordance with the Secretary's memorandum, the Assistant Secretary will ensure that pending non-gaming land-into-trust applications fully satisfy the requirements set forth in applicable federal law, including but not limited to the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the land-into-trust application regulations (25 C.F.R. Part 151), and any applicable case precedent. Once these applications have been evaluated under all applicable legal standards, the Assistant Secretary will then move forward "diligently and expeditiously" with decisions on such applications.

The memorandum may be viewed at:
http://www.indianaffairs.gov/WhoWeAre/BIA/OTS/RealEstate/index.htm.