Commission to take comprehensive look at how Interior manages nearly $4 billion in Native American Trust Funds

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For Immediate Release: November 30, 2011
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WASHINGTON -- As part of President Obama's commitment to fulfilling this nation's trust responsibilities to Native Americans, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today named five prominent American Indians to a national commission that will undertake a forward-looking, comprehensive evaluation of Interior's trust management of nearly $4 billion in Native American trust funds.

"This commission will play a key role in our ongoing efforts to empower Indian nations and strengthen nation-to-nation relationships," Secretary Salazar said in naming the appointees to the Secretarial Commission on Indian Trust Administration and Reform. "The five members each bring extensive experience and knowledge to the commission, and I look forward to their findings and recommendations for how we can fully meet our trust responsibilities to the First Americans."

"Our trust administration must be more transparent, responsive, customer-friendly and accountable in managing these substantial funds and assets," Deputy Secretary of the Interior David J. Hayes said. "Building upon the progress made with the historic Cobell Settlement, this commission will help usher in a new era of trust administration."

The members of the Commission are:

- **Chair - Fawn R. Sharp** is the current president of the Quinault Indian Nation, the current President of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, and a former administrative law judge for the State of Washington and Governor of the Washington State Bar Association.
- **Dr. Peterson Zah**, an established leader in Native American government and education circles, was the last chairman of the Navajo Tribal Council and the first elected President of the Navajo Nation.
- **Stacy Leeds**, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation , is Dean and Professor of Law at the University of Arkansas School of Law and former Director of the Tribal Law and Government Center at the University of Kansas School of Law.
- **Tex G. Hall**, current chairman of Three Affiliated Tribes and past President of the National Congress of American Indians, is currently serving as Chairman of the Inter Tribal Economic Alliance and is the Chairman of the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association.
- **Bob Anderson**, an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (Bois Forte Band), has six years of experience working at the Department of the Interior from 1995-2001 as Associate Solicitor for Indian Affairs and as counselor to the Secretary of the Interior on Indian law and natural resource issues. He is currently a Professor of Law and Director of the Native American Law Center at the University of Washington, and holds a long-term appointment as the Oneida Nation Visiting Professor of Law at Harvard Law School.

Interior selected the members after a public solicitation for nominations and, in consultation with trust beneficiaries, evaluated the candidates on the basis of their expertise and experience, including in government and trust, financial, asset and natural resource management. Members were selected in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act and they will serve without compensation.

Within 24 months, the Commission is expected to complete a comprehensive evaluation of Interior's management and administration of the trust assets and offer recommendations of how to improve in the future.

Salazar's announcement comes in advance of the third White House Tribal Nations Conference happening Friday, December 2nd at the Department of the Interior. The conference will bring together leaders from the 565 federally recognized tribes to hear from President Obama and to build upon the Administration's commitment to strengthen the government-to-government relationship with tribal nations.

Salazar established the framework for the Commission in a 2009 Secretarial Order , which addressed the Department's future responsibilities for trust management after the Cobell Settlement agreement set forth resolution of a class action lawsuit regarding the U.S. government's trust management and accounting of individual Native American trust accounts and resources. The Cobell Settlement will be effective when all appeals are resolved favorably.

Under federal law, Interior is responsible for managing 56 million surface acres and 57 million acres of subsurface mineral estates for 384,000 Individual Indian Money (IIM) accounts and about 2,900 tribal accounts (over 250 tribes). Tribal trust assets include land, timber, grazing, oil, gas and mineral resources. More at http://www.doi.gov/ost/about_ost/facts.html

On trust lands, the Department manages about $3.9 billion in trust funds and more than 109,000 leases. For fiscal year 2011, funds from leases, use permits, land sales and income from financial assets, totaling about $400 million, were collected for about 384,000 open IIM accounts. About $609 million was collected in fiscal year 2011 for about 2,900 tribal accounts. There are currently 156,596 individual Indian land allotments and more than 4.7 million fractionated interests.

For more information and images of the Commission members, please visit http://www.doi.gov/cobell/Commission-Bios.cfm

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