Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: October 6, 2011
Print PDF

WASHINGTON, D.C.— U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) Deputy Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs for Policy and Economic Development Jodi Gillette and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Director Michael Black met with tribal leaders in Oklahoma City, Okla., today in the sixth regional government-to-government tribal consultation meeting on the Trust Land Consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement. The consultations are part of the Obama Administration's commitment to re-invigorating nation-to-nation relationships with tribes.

"These consultation sessions have been invaluable to the Interior Department's efforts to adhere to the obligations of the Cobell Settlement," said Gillette. "In order to ensure that our efforts continue in the right direction, it is important that we hear from tribal leaders on their concerns and issues relating to this landmark case and our collaborative efforts."

"I am pleased to see that we are moving forward in close collaboration with the tribes on ways of implementing the settlement," said Black. "The tribal input from these sessions is very helpful and we will continue to work closely with the tribes."

Today's participants included leaders and representatives of a number of tribes from the Eastern Oklahoma and Southern Plains Regions and other BIA Regions.

On May 27, 2011, U.S. Senior District Judge Thomas F. Hogan granted communication between representatives of the United States and Cobell class members only in regards to the Trust Land Consolidation component of the Settlement.

BACKGROUND ON COBELL SETTLEMENT:

The $3.4 billion Cobell settlement was approved by Congress on November 30, 2010 (Claims Resolution Act of 2010) and signed by President Obama on December 8, 2010. The Cobell Settlement will address the federal government's responsibility for an historical accounting of individual Indian trust accounts and trust mismanagement claims on behalf of more than 300,000 individual American Indians. A fund of $1.5 billion will be used to compensate class members for their historical accounting, trust administration and asset mismanagement claims.

In addition, to address the continued proliferation of thousands of new trust accounts caused by the "fractionation" of land interests through successive generations, the Settlement establishes a $1.9 billion fund for the voluntary buy-back and consolidation of fractionated land interests. The land consolidation program will provide individual American Indians with an opportunity to obtain cash payments for divided trust land interests and free up the land for the benefit of tribal communities. Up to $60 million of the $1.9 billion will be set aside to provide scholarships for post secondary higher education and vocational training for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The locations and dates for the remaining regional tribal consultations can be found at: www.doi.gov/cobell.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs discharges the duties of the Secretary of the Interior with the authority and direct responsibility to strengthen the government-to-government relationship with the nation's 565 federally recognized tribes, advocate policies that support Indian self-determination, protect and preserve Indian trust assets, and administer a wide array of laws, regulations and functions relating to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, tribal members and individual trust beneficiaries. The Assistant Secretary oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education. For more information, visit www.indianaffairs.gov.