Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Department of the Interior proposes to acknowledge the Shinnecock Indian Nation of Southampton, New York as a federally recognized Indian tribe, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs George T. Skibine announced today. The Department will issue a notice of this proposed finding in the Federal Register.

The Shinnecock petitioner has met all seven mandatory criteria for Federal acknowledgment as set forth in 25 CFR Part 83.7. Those criteria include the following: that the Shinnecock has been continuously identified as an American Indian entity since 1900; has been a distinct community since historical times; has maintained political influence over its members; has a governing document describing its governance procedures and membership criteria; and has provided a list of its current members who descend from an historical Indian tribe and are not members of another federally recognized tribe.

The petitioner has occupied a land base in Southampton, New York that was formally defined in 1703, reduced in size in 1859, and exists today as a state Indian reservation. Since 1792, when the State of New York established a political system by which the Shinnecocks would annually elect three members as trustees to manage Shinnecock lands, the trustees have acted to protect Shinnecock interests. The Shinnecock has an official membership of 1,066 individuals.

The proposed finding meets the Dec. 15, 2009, deadline the petitioner and United States negotiated in a settlement agreement that the Court approved on May 26, 2009, in Shinnecock v. Salazar, No. CV-06-5013 (E.D.N.Y.). There is a 90-day comment period during which the petitioner or any individual or organization may submit comments on the proposed finding.

However, either the Shinnecock petitioner or an interested party may request, in writing, that the comment period remain open for 180 days. A copy of the court order, “Stipulation and Order for Settlement of Plaintiff’s Unreasonable Delay Claim,” describing these and other modifications, is found in Appendix B of the proposed finding. The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs is responsible for fulfilling the Interior Department’s trust responsibilities and promoting self-determination on behalf of the 564 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 the tribes and their members, about 1.9 million individual American Indians and Alaska Natives, and the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, which is responsible for administering the acknowledgment process.

The Assistant Secretary has delegated authority to sign some Federal acknowledgment findings, including this proposed finding, to the Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs effective June 4, 2009. The Department will post copies of the proposed finding and Federal Register notice on its Indian Affairs website at http://www.indianaffairs.gov.