Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Carl J. Artman today issued a final determination not to acknowledge the petitioner known as the St. Francis/Sokoki Band of Abenakis of Vermont as an Indian tribe. This petitioner, located in Franklin County in northwestern Vermont, has 1,171 members with enrollment files completed to the petitioner's satisfaction.

The petitioner claims to have descended as a group mainly from a Western Abenaki Indian tribe, the Missisquoi Indians, in northwestern Vermont. The available evidence indicates that by 1800 the disruption caused by colonial wars and non-Indian settlement had forced almost all the Western Abenakis in northern New England to relocate to the Saint Francis River area of Quebec, Canada. The petitioner claims that its ancestors remained behind in northwestern Vermont or moved to Canada until it was safe to return, hiding their Indian identity until the 1970's to avoid notice by their non-Indian neighbors. However, the available evidence does not support these claims. Instead, it indicates that the petitioner is a collection of individuals of claimed but mostly undemonstrated Indian ancestry with little or no social or historical connection with each other before the petitioner formally organized in the 1970's.

The petitioner did not satisfy four of the seven mandatory criteria for acknowledgment under 25 CFR Part 83, specifically criteria 83.7(a), 83.7(b), 83.7(c), and 83.7(e).

Criterion 83.7(a) requires that external observers have identified the petitioner as an American Indian entity on a substantially continuous basis since 1900. The available evidence demonstrated that external observers identified the petitioner as an American Indian entity on a substantially continuous basis since 1975, not since 1900.

Criterion 83.7(b) requires that a predominant portion of the petitioning group has comprised a distinct community since historical times. The available evidence demonstrated that at no time since the early contact period did the petitioner show that it was a distinct community. Even since the 1970's, the petitioner has not demonstrated that a significant portion of its membership regularly associate with each other or that its recent social and cultural activities are of more than symbolic value to the group as a whole.