Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Interior Associate Deputy Secretary James E. Cason today issued a Final Determination to acknowledge the Mashpee Wampanoag Indian Tribal Council, Inc., (Mashpee) as an Indian tribe. The Mashpee is a group of 1,453 members located on Cape Cod in Barnstable County, Mass.

On March 31, 2006, the Department issued a Proposed Finding recommending the Mashpee for Federal acknowledgment as an Indian tribe based on evidence presented in its petition. Since the 1620s the Mashpee has existed as a community distinct from other populations in the area. Social interactions and relationships among group members are maintained through kinship ties and residential proximity. The Mashpee has maintained political influence and authority over its members as an autonomous entity since first sustained contact. The exercise of political authority has taken many forms including political control of the town of Mashpee by the group from 1870 to 1974 and by an incorporated council from 1974 to the present. About 97 percent of the group's current members have ancestors who were a part of the historical Mashpee tribe enumerated in a State report by John Milton Earle in 1861. Overall, the group presented evidence meeting all seven mandatory criteria of the Federal acknowledgment regulations (25 CFR Part 83).

The Department made the Final Determination following a review of the petitioner's and public's comments on the Proposed Finding, as well as the petitioner's response to the public comments. The Office of the Attorney General of Massachusetts provided the only substantive comments from a third party. The Department considered these comments and concluded that they did not affect the decision to acknowledge the Mashpee as an Indian tribe.

Federal acknowledgment of a group as an Indian tribe establishes a government-to-government relationship between the United States and an Indian tribe and is a prerequisite to the protection, services, and benefits of the Federal government available to Indian tribes by virtue of their status as Indian tribes. This determination is final and effective 90 days after publication of a notice in the Federal Register unless any interested party requests reconsideration with the Interior Board of Indian Appeals.

For copies of the Proposed Finding and Final Determination, visit the Interior Department website at www.doi.gov/bia/federal_acknowledgment_decisions.html.