Ceremony concluding transfer also celebrates return of tribe's ancestral lands

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PALA, Calif. – During a visit to the Pala Indian Reservation in Southern California today, Interior Associate Deputy Secretary James E. Cason announced that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has completed the transfer of 18 acres of land from a former United States Air Force base located near the City of San Bernadino, Calif., to the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, a federally recognized Serrano tribe headquartered in Patton, Calif. Cason was in attendance at a signing ceremony for the final transaction in a process that has returned to the San Manuel tribe lands that were a part of its ancestral land base. He was joined at the event by San Manuel Vice Chairman Henry Duro, San Manuel tribal officials and other officials from the Department of the Interior.

"I congratulate the United States Air Force, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians for their hard work and determination," Cason said. "Through consultation, cooperation and communication, they have effectively brought the long and complicated process of transferring these surplus Federal lands to a successful conclusion."

The area where the 200-member San Manuel tribe is located is known as the Inland Empire. Although home to the Serrano people for centuries, the region's non-Indian population came first from Spain, then Mexico. In January 1891, Congress authorized the establishment of a 25-acre reservation for the tribe located at the base of McKinley Mountain in the San Bernadino Mountain Range. A major geological feature of the San Manuel Reservation is the web of fault lines that runs through it, including the San Andreas Fault which extends under the tribe's administrative offices. The new land is better suited for the tribe's needs and will support its efforts to contribute to the local economy.

"This is a joyous day for the San Manuel people," Duro said. "We have waited a long time to reclaim these parts of our ancestral lands so that we can develop our tribal economy and participate in the revitalization of the Inland Empire region."

Today's ceremony capped a process that started 10 years ago when the San Manuel tribe sought to acquire portions of the Norton Air Force Base after its closing in 1994. The Air Force agreed to a no-cost transfer of three parcels of the surplus Federal property, which includes the Air Combat Camera facility and other, smaller buildings, for the tribe's benefit in accordance with the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949.

Although the parcels received a waiver of fair market value, the transaction has not been without cost to the tribe. The tribe has already renovated one building, using it as a training facility for tribal and local fire and safety personnel, but the Air Combat Camera facility will require significant investment to render it useable. The lands are being transferred through the BIA under the authority of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975.