Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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**WASHINGTON** – Interior Associate Deputy Secretary James E. Cason announced today that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has undertaken its initial response to assisting tribes in the Gulf Coast states who are victims of Hurricane Katrina. There are six federally recognized tribes located in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi who were impacted by the powerful storm. "Our hearts and prayers go out to the victims of this devastating event and their families," Cason said. "The Bureau of Indian Affairs, along with other Interior Department agencies, is working directly with affected tribal communities in assessing and responding to their public safety, emergency access and emergency services needs."

The affected communities belong to the Poarch Creek Band in Alabama, the Chitimacha Tribe, Coushatta Indian Tribe, Jena Band of Choctaw and Tunica-Biloxi Tribe in Louisiana, and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians in Mississippi. While all of the tribes were left with varying degrees of wind and rain damage, the Choctaws' tribal government offices in Philadelphia, Miss., and several, largely rural communities lay directly in the storm's path resulting in extensive physical damage and loss of telephone service and power.

The BIA's Eastern Regional Office, headquartered in Nashville, Tenn., and Choctaw Agency in Philadelphia are coordinating their recovery efforts with the Mississippi Choctaw tribal government, which include arranging for fresh water to be trucked in from Arkansas, utilizing agency road equipment to help clear debris from roadways, exploring ways to bring in supplies of ice, fuel and food, and assigning law enforcement personnel to protect lives and property.

The BIA Office of Law Enforcement Services (OLES) personnel arrived at the Choctaw reservation shortly after midnight on Tuesday with a Mobile Command Vehicle and Emergency Response Task Force (ERT) to assist Choctaw police with their recovery efforts. Downed trees and power lines impeded their ability to reach the reservation quickly.

The Bureau also is evaluating requests from the affected tribes for financial assistance to help with their recovery efforts. For example, the Chitimacha Tribe is caring for upwards of 400 tribal members who had been living in New Orleans and are now homeless.

"The BIA is committed to helping these communities get back on their feet," Cason said. "We will continue to do all we can to meet that goal."