Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: June 14, 2004
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WASHINGTON – Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Aurene M. Martin today issued a Final Determination in which she declined to acknowledge as an Indian tribe a group known as the Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe of Indians headquartered in Trumbull, Conn. The Golden Hill Paugussett petitioning group did not demonstrate that it meets all seven mandatory criteria for Federal acknowledgment as an Indian tribe under Part 83 of Title 25 of the Code of Federal Regulations, "Procedures for Establishing that an American Indian Group Exists 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 tribes. This determination is final and effective 90 days after publication of a notice of the determination in the Federal Register unless the petitioner or any interested party requests reconsideration with the Interior Board of Indian Appeals (IBIA).

The regulations at 25 CFR Part 83 provide a means to acknowledge Indian tribes that have continuous social and political existence. The Golden Hill Paugussett petitioner, however, did not establish its continuous existence, failing to meet criteria 83.7(a), (b), (c) and (e) of the acknowledgment regulations.

The Final Determination reevaluated a January 21, 2003 Proposed Finding's conclusion that the petitioner met criterion 83.7(a). The Final Determination concludes the petitioner did not demonstrate that it was identified as an Indian entity on a "substantially continuous" basis since 1900. The available identifications apply only to the State-recognized Golden Hill entity, which comprises a small portion (about 33 percent) of the petitioner. They do not apply to the predominant portion of the group (about 63 percent) added in 1999, which claims but has not demonstrated descent from another related group, the historical Turkey Hill tribe. Four percent of the group is of unknown ancestry. These members were not identified as part of the State-recognized Golden Hill entity from 1900 to 1998, nor identified separately as an Indian entity. Thus, the petitioner as a whole has not been identified on a substantially continuous basis since 1900.

Under criterion 83.7(b), the Final Determination affirms the Proposed Finding's conclusion that the historical Golden Hill Indians ceased to exist as a distinct community in 1823. The petitioner has not demonstrated distinct community since 1823. The evidence presented did not support the petitioner's claims that the historical Turkey Hill and historical Golden Hill Indians were always one entity. Available evidence shows that the historical Turkey Hill Indians no longer maintained tribal relations and ceased to exist as an Indian entity around 1825, and the State of Connecticut never recognized the historical Turkey Hill group as part of the State-recognized Golden Hill entity.

Under criterion 83.7(c), the Final Determination affirms the Proposed Finding's conclusion that between 1802 and 1973, the evidence does not establish that an entity with an internal political process existed. Since 1973, a few individuals formally organized into a more visible and active political group. However, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate bilateral political interaction between the leaders and the members, or widespread support for or involvement in political processes.

Under criterion 83.7(e), the Final Determination affirms the Proposed Finding's conclusion that the petitioner has not demonstrated that its membership consists of individuals who descend from a historical Indian tribe or from historical Indian tribes that combined and functioned from as a single autonomous entity.

The Golden Hill Paugussett met criteria 83.7 (d), (f) and (g) of the acknowledgment regulations by demonstrating that it has a governing document, that its membership is not principally composed of members of an acknowledged North American Indian tribe, and that it is not the subject of congressional legislation that has expressly terminated or forbidden the Federal relationship.
