Assistant Secretary to announce BIA initiative for growing healthier Indian communities

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs David W. Anderson will join Secretary Gale Norton, officials of the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management and other government and private-sector partners at the "Get Fit With US" kick-off event for Summer 2004 under President Bush's HealthierUS Initiative that will be held June 5 at Harriet Island Regional Park in St. Paul, Minn., starting at 10:00 a.m. (CDT). While there, he will announce "Healthier Indian Communities," the Bureau of Indian Affairs initiative to assist tribal communities combat the scourge of alcohol and substance abuse, and participate in a Family Fun Walk starting at 11:00 a.m. on the grounds of Harriet Island as part of the event's National Trails Day celebration.

"Our Healthier Indian Communities Initiative will support tribes who are fighting a war every day on alcohol and substance abuse, and the gang activity it brings, which threaten the security of their citizens," Anderson said. "We must see to it that Indian people have the skills, information and training they need to make positive life choices so that healthy communities can grow from healthy families."

The Get Fit With US event will kick off a summer of recreational activity by demonstrating how federal, state and private partnerships can promote healthier lifestyles through recreational activity on public lands and waters. The event coincides with the second anniversary of the President's signing on June 20, 2002 of Executive Order 13266 that launched the HealthierUS effort in order to promote personal fitness for all Americans.

The BIA's Healthier Indian Communities Initiative supports the agency's overall goal under the Indian Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1986 (Public Law 99- 570) to improve the quality of life in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. One quality of life area where the BIA has worked with Indian tribes is on developing alcohol and substance abuse prevention strategies.

Under this initiative, the Bureau's Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention Division will identify and assist two pilot tribal sites in revitalizing their Tribal Action Plans to mobilize resources that will develop resilience and enhance protective factors against alcohol and substance abuse.

The projects developed under the Healthier Indian Communities Initiative will be designed to raise awareness that alcohol and substance abuse are preventable, establish pilot community and peer-based strategies to address alcohol and substance abuse, empower Indian adult and youth leaders with the latest knowledge and skills to effectively address abuse issues, and promote prevention education along with youth-targeted social activities and economic opportunities. In addition, proven prevention strategies such as peer youth mentoring, parental and community development training, and physical activities such as golf, jogging and walking also will be employed.

The Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs has responsibility for helping to fulfill the Interior Department’s trust responsibilities to individual and tribal trust beneficiaries, as well as promoting tribal self-determination, self-governance and economic development for the nation’s 562 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and their members. The Assistant Secretary also oversees the BIA; the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, which administers the Federal Acknowledgment Process; and the BIA school system, which serves approximately 48,000 American Indian children in 184 elementary and secondary schools located on or near 63 reservations in 23 states

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