Officials confident that soon-to-be completed reorganization of BIA, OST will lead to enhanced services for trust beneficiaries

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs David W. Anderson and Special Trustee for American Indians Ross O. Swimmer testified jointly today before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the Interior Department's trust initiatives for the 21st century and the successful implementation of Secretary Gale Norton's *Comprehensive Trust Management Plan*. The two officials expressed their belief that the soon-to-be completed reorganization of the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians under the plan will lead to enhanced services for tribal and individual Indian trust beneficiaries.

"We are confident that the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Trust Management Plan will enable the Department to provide important services to Indian country more efficiently and effectively than in the past," Anderson and Swimmer said in a prepared statement to the committee. "We are confident that our trust initiatives under the plan will result in a noticeable enhancement to the level of service our organizations currently provide."

Approximately 4,000 tasks implementing the reorganization have been or soon will be completed. The new organizational structure will increase emphasis on tribal economic development, self-determination and self-governance policies and projects; increase accountability by adding over 100 employees in the field to serve as additional resources for fiduciary trust transactions and increase service delivery by BIA and OST front line staff to provide consolidated beneficiary services.

After launching the effort to develop a comprehensive approach to improving Indian trust management by Secretary Norton in January 2002, the department undertook an assessment of its role as trustee and its management of business lines such as beneficiary services, financial accountability and natural resource management, as well as developing efficient and standard business processes, including best practices, for these business lines.

The first phase of this trust reengineering project – called the "As-Is" phase – documented how trust operations were then being conducted and was completed in February 2003. On March 21, 2003, a report was issued on the "As-Is" phase detailing the following eight core Indian trust processes: probate, title services, beneficiary services, appraisal, surface asset management, subsurface asset management, accounting management and cadastral survey. The second phase of the trust reengineering project, the "To-Be" phase, has taken a fresh look at how trust operations should be conducted. This phase also involves designing new processes and related improvements in support systems, organizations, training and personnel requirements.

The *Comprehensive Trust Management Plan* is the department's roadmap for guiding and designing the implementation of its trust reform efforts. One component of the plan is the realignment of trust functions of the OAS-IA, BIA and OST into a coordinated and integrated system within Interior to reduce redundancies and to put greater emphasis on providing services to individual Indian and tribal trust beneficiaries more efficiently and effectively than in the past.

The plan resulted from over 45 consultation meetings department officials held throughout 2002 with tribal leaders and in meetings of the Joint Tribal Leaders/DOI Task Force on Trust Reform. In June 2003, the department held 15 briefings with BIA regional office employees on the reorganization and in September further consultation meetings were held with tribal leaders on the realignment of BIA regional and agency offices.

Within the Interior Department structure, BIA retains management responsibility for trust assets and resources. To allow BIA regional directors and agency superintendents to focus on service delivery, regional and agency administrative and IT functions have been consolidated under two new deputy assistant secretaries within the office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs who will provide support to the regional and agency offices as needed. Under this structure, BIA managers now can focus exclusively on providing trust services to tribes and individuals while at the same time providing tribal government services such as economic development, social services and environmental protection.

In addition, the Office of Indian Education Programs, which continues to oversee the BIA school system and administer education programs for BIA students, and the Office of Law Enforcement Services also have undertaken realignments of their respective organizational structures. The OIEP realignment took place on Oct. 19, 2003 and the OLES reorganization will be completed by March 31.

OST continues to be responsible for the management of financial assets and certain reform projects while maintaining its statutory oversight responsibilities. The Special Trustee has added regional trust administrators and trust officers in the field to work closely with BIA regional and agency trust services staff. Trust officers will eventually become the line of contact for tribal and individual Indian beneficiaries regarding trust assets ownership, account balances (for individual Indian and tribal trust accounts) and trust transactions. OST is working to fill six regional trust administrator positions and expects to have 45 trust officers on board by the end of fiscal year 2004.

The department foresees tremendous benefits to tribes and employees in several ways. For tribes, such benefits will include: a focus on beneficiary services, the promoting of self governance and self-determination, ensuring trust accountability, allowing trust employees to focus on trust matters, ensuring better use of trust assets, and keeping trust asset decision-making at the agency level. For employees, benefits will include keeping trust asset decision making at the agency level, allowing trust employees to focus on trust matters, standardizing trust business processes, improving management, creating opportunities for professional growth, and instilling personal and organizational accountability.

The Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs has responsibility for fulfilling the 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 179-year old agency that provides services to individual American Indians and Alaska Natives from the federally recognized tribes; the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, which administers the

Federal Acknowledgment Process; and the BIA school system which serves almost 50,000 American Indian children located on or near 63 reservations in 23 states.

The Special Trustee for American Indians is responsible for the oversight and coordination of the department's efforts to reform its practices relating to the management and discharge of the Secretary's Indian trust responsibilities.

Note to Editors: Assistant Secretary Anderson and Special Trustee Swimmer's joint statement may be viewed via the Department's website at www.doi.gov.