Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: December 4, 2002
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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb today announced a major proposal to realign the management organization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) to improve services to individual Indian and tribal trust beneficiaries. The "Indian Trust Management Plan" is the result of consultation meetings the Interior Department held this year with tribal leaders and the efforts of the Joint Tribal/DOI Task Force on Trust Reform to find ways of improving the Department's management of Indian trust assets.

"The Indian Trust Management Plan closely reflects the ideas and concepts we developed at our consultation sessions and task force meetings," McCaleb said. "It is a blueprint to guide the Interior Department's trust management efforts well into the future. Using the blueprint, we will be able to accentuate accountability and improve direct services to all trust beneficiaries."

The Plan will provide enhanced benefits to trust beneficiaries, including 1) dedicating personnel to provide consolidated beneficiary services; 2) increasing the emphasis on tribal contracting and compacting; 3) preserving staff and monetary resources within BIA and OST; 4) improving organization accountability; 5) elevating the profile of Indian economic development and 6) grouping organizational functions more efficiently.

While the BIA's structure will remain largely unchanged, the Plan calls for new staffing in the agency's regional offices. All natural resource trust asset management will remain within the BIA, but the management of trust functions at the regional and agency levels would be achieved through the creation of a Deputy Regional Director for trust operations and a Deputy Regional Director for all other BIA services except for those that report directly to the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs.

In addition, a new Office of Self-Governance and Self-Determination will be placed under a new Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Development Policy.

Finally, while the OST would retain its oversight responsibilities of fiduciary trust asset management and other authorities, the Plan creates a new Deputy Special Trustee for Trust Accountability to be responsible for trust training, regulatory policy and procedures and a Trust Program Management Center. The Center would be centrally located within Indian Country with a staff of up to six trust administrators overseeing trust officers and trust account managers in the field.

The Indian Trust Management Plan is the culmination of the Department's extensive meetings with tribal leaders following Secretary Norton's release in November 2001 of a proposal to improve the Department's management of Indian trust assets by consolidating all of the BIA's trust functions into another entity, the Bureau of Indian Trust Asset Management (BITAM), under a new Assistant Secretary for Indian Trust Asset Management.

After hearing from tribal leaders about the proposal, Secretary Norton held several consultation meetings with them to discuss her ideas as well as those put forth by tribes to improve the Department's trust management efforts. She also agreed to establish the Joint Tribal/DOI Task Force on

Trust Reform to review all of the proposals and develop recommendations for the Department.

For nearly 12 months, the Joint Tribal/DOI Task Force on Trust Reform has commanded the attention of Indian Country and the unprecedented, full-time involvement of the most senior officials of the Department. The meetings generated more than 5,500 page of testimony and over 1,500 senior staff hours were dedicated to the effort.

“We could not have come this far without the input of tribal leaders,” McCaleb said. “I want to extend my personal appreciation to the members of the Joint Tribal/DOI Task Force on Trust Reform for their dedication and commitment to this major undertaking.”

The Joint Tribal/DOI Task Force on Trust Reform will be reconvening in Washington, D.C., on December 16, 2002.

The Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs has responsibility for fulfilling the Department’s trust responsibility to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and individuals, as well as promoting tribal self-determination and economic development. The Assistant Secretary oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is responsible for providing services to approximately 1.4 million American Indians and Alaska Natives from the nation’s 562 Federally recognized tribes.

Note to Editors: *The 2 charts that accompany this press release may also be viewed via the Department’s website at www.doi.gov.*
