"We must help, rather than hinder, tribes to create jobs and sustainable economies."

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb today announced the awarding of a $250,000 grant to the Metlakatla Indian Community (MIC) of the Annette Island Reserve in southeast Alaska to support the tribe's efforts to explore mineral development on its lands. The grant will fund an environmental review of the tribe's Bald Ridge Aggregate Project, a proposed quarry that would help alleviate high unemployment among tribal members and provide a source of high quality crushed rock for infrastructure projects in the Pacific Northwest.

"Through the Bald Ridge Aggregate Project, the Metlakatla Indian Community is working to improve its employment and economic conditions in a way that is sensitive to their culture and environment," McCaleb said.

With approximately 2,000 members, the Metlakatla Indian Community is the only federally recognized Tsimshian tribal community with the only federal Indian reservation in Alaska. It is located about six miles south of Ketchikan in the southernmost part of the state. For decades the tribe's primary industries have been fishing, logging and tourism. However, downturns in the fishing and logging areas in the past few years have led to a high unemployment rate of over 80 percent from a low of 5 percent.

"The National Summit on Emerging Tribal Economies made clear that we in the federal government must help, rather than hinder, tribes as they look for new ways to create jobs and sustainable economies," said McCaleb. "The Metlakatla Indian Community, which has the potential to become one of the Nation's major suppliers of high quality crushed rock, is trying to do just that. For our part, we must do what we can to see that they succeed."

The Bald Ridge Aggregate Project site, which is located on the southern portion of the Reserve, is calculated to contain over 240 million tons of high quality crushed rock to be used for permanent bases, rock for concrete and riprap for bank stabilization. In addition, the site's proximity to a deep-water bay makes it ideal for transporting the crushed rock by barge or ship. If successfully developed, the proposed quarry could provide long-term employment for a number of tribal members and bring much-needed revenue to the tribe.

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 and the nation's 562 Federally recognized tribes.