Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: June 4, 2002
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Transmittal Letter From Secretary Norton Full Report Chart of Key Dates List of Task Force Members Photograph

(**WASHINGTON**) – Interior Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb and Tex Hall, chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes of North Dakota, presented to Interior Secretary Gale Norton today the Joint Tribal Leaders/DOI Task Force on Trust Reform's five options for improving the department's management of Indian trust funds and assets. McCaleb and Hall are Task Force co-chairs.

The five options reflect the best features and major elements contained in the Task Force's submissions. The Task Force is proposing to submit these options to Indian Country as part of the department's on going tribal consultation process on trust reform.

"The Task Force has worked diligently and swiftly," Secretary Norton said. "I'm confident we will continue to make progress. This effort is a excellent example of how communication, consultation and cooperation can bring people together to achieve meaningful trust reform for the future good of Indian Country."

The 13-section report gives an overview of the Task Force's history, mission and organization; outlines proposals submitted by tribes and others that were reviewed by the Task Force; identifies the Interior Department's five options for trust management improvement along with pros and cons for each option; proposes specific "cross-cutting" principles that the five options should address; explores changes needed at low, mid, and upper-management levels within the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the department; and recommends "key" criteria with which to evaluate the options.

On Nov. 15, 2001, Secretary Norton announced her proposal to transfer and consolidate Indian trust asset management functions currently administered by the BIA and other Interior bureaus to one specific organization. She also announced the establishment of an Assistant Secretary for Indian Trust Assets Management to oversee trust reform. After holding an extensive series of consultation meetings with tribal leaders earlier this year, Secretary Norton agreed to sponsor a task force to review her proposal along with alternative plans submitted by tribes. By the end of April, a total of 29 alternative proposals and comments had been received, reflecting a wide range of ideas.

The Task Force is composed key Interior Department officials, along with 24 tribal leaders and 16 alternates from the BIA's 12 regions. Co-chairing the task force are Deputy Interior Secretary Steve Griles, McCaleb, Hall and Sue Masten, Chairwoman of the Yurok Tribes of Indians of California.

"The Joint Tribal Leaders/DOI Task Force has taken its mission very seriously," McCaleb said. "I commend the task force members for their hard work and commitment to the process of finding an appropriate, equitable solution to the current state of trust management within the department."

"The Task Force has selected what we think are the best options for further consultation with the tribes. We need to clarify the lines of responsibility and put someone in charge of developing a trust

accounting system. After that, the hard work will really start in actually designing the system and developing the policies and procedures that will work out in Indian Country," Three Affiliated Tribes of North Dakota Chairman Tex Hall said.

The Task Force held its first meeting in Shepherdstown, W.Va., on Feb. 1-4, 2002. Subsequent meetings were held in Phoenix, Ariz., in March; San Diego, Calif., in April and Minneapolis, Minn., in May. The task force's next scheduled meeting is June 13-15 in Bismarck, N.D. Additional meetings will be held over the next six months to allow the task force to continue its work.

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