Mobile - Washington County Band of Choctaw Indians of South Alabama (MOWA)

Media Contact: Thomas W. Sweeney: (202) 208-2535
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Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs (AS-IA) Kevin Gover signed on December 16, 1997, a Final Determination that denies Federal acknowledgment of the Mobile - Washington County Band of Choctaw Indians of South Alabama (MOWA) of Mount Vernon, AL.

The AS-IA found that the petitioner failed to meet one of the mandatory criteria set forth in 25 CPR 83.7, namely: descent from a historical tribe. The Final Determination means the Alabama group is not eligible for certain rights and benefits accorded tribes that are granted "Federal recognition" or "acknowledgment," and therefore it does not have a special government-to-government relationship with the United States.

The AS-IA determined that the Alabama group did not descend from the historical Choctaw tribe or from any one of the other five tribes it claimed. The Final Determination noted that the petitioning group is derived from two core families that were resident in southwestern Alabama by the end of the first third of the nineteenth century. All persons on the petitioner's membership (3,960) roll descend from these two families. About one percent of the members have documented Indian heritage but it derives from an ancestor whose grandchildren married into the petitioning group after 1880, and from another individual who married into the petitioning group in 1904. This insignificant Indian ancestry for a few individual members does not satisfy the criterion that the group as a whole descends from a historical tribe. The MOWA ancestors, most of whom were well documented, were not identified as American Indians or descendants of any particular tribe in the records made in their own life times.

The MOWA ancestors were not found in the records concerning the historic tribes. Although the MOWA presently have an oral tradition of descent from the Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, or other tribes, the stories could not be substantiated from the wealth of records submitted by the petitioner or researched by the BIA.

The BIA employs historians, anthropologists, and genealogists who research the claims of groups seeking recognition as Indian tribes. Each case is evaluated individually. Under current regulations, the MOW A and interested parties have 90 days to request reconsideration on the BIA's Final Determination with the Interior Board of Indian Appeals. All requests for reconsideration must contain a detailed statement of the grounds for the request, and include any new evidence to be considered. The request should be in writing and addressed to the Interior Board of Indian Appeals, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240.