Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Three Denver based Offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) are assisting tribes to prepare for the 21st Century by providing access to state-of-the-art science in resource management. The Division of Energy and Mineral Resources, Geographic Data Service Center, and the Division of Forestry's Branch of Forest Resources Planning provide highly technical assistance and services to the Indian Community. "These offices offer the latest technology and software programs available. With the assistance of these offices participating Indian tribes have comprehensive data and sophisticated information management systems at their disposal to effectively manage their natural resources," Hilda Manuel, Deputy Commissioner of lndian Affairs said.

Tribes are increasingly recognizing the importance of these tools to achieve the goals of self-sufficiency and self-determination. Budget cutbacks require tribes to do "more with less" necessitating the use of advanced technologies such as spatial information systems. The primary challenge in using these tools is the technological complexities and computer skills and resources that are required. The Geographic Data Service Center meets this challenge by providing tribes the training, consultation services, support, and equipment access necessary to meet their goals.

"Through this direct technical assistance the Indian community has been able to negotiate mineral leases that have higher yields than non-Indian mineral owners on the average." Manuel said. "It is important for tribal governments to have the best data available regarding their natural resources to actively, and· intelligently manage their resources. The services that these offices offer to individual resource owners and Tribes are free of charge and designed to assist those with little or no technical expertise or computer experience."

The Division of Energy and Mineral Resources (DEMR) provides the best available technical and economic advice and assistance to Indian Mineral Owners. The Division's programs include (1) Native American Energy and Mineral Institute, (2) Mineral Assessment, (3) National Indian Energy and Mineral Resource Data Base, (4) National Indian Seismic Evaluation, (5) Outreach and (6) National Indian Oil and Gas Evaluation and Management System.

The Division of Forestry's Branch of Forest Resources Planning (BOFRP) is located in the same building and has established a partnership to share office infrastructure and communications with the DEMR. This Branch provides Bureau wide coordination, direction, and assistance in forest management planning activities e.g., forest inventories, analysis of data, forest management planning, and forest environmental assessments. This Branch maintains the National Indian Forestry Data Base and Continuous Forest Inventory (CPI) System which are invaluable management data resources for the Nation and participating Indian tribes.

The Geographic Data Service Center (GDSC) provides tribes with advanced spatial information processing capabilities such as, Geographic Information systems (GIS), Global Positioning Systems · (GPS), and satellite image mapping. These powerful tools are used to effectively manage natural resources and engineering level applications (i.e., road design and management) and are now being used to solve tough technical problems with real estate management in Indian Country.

"In order for the Indian community to be become more familiar with these services, there will be updates on each program area relative to their innovative initiatives and major accomplishments." Ms. Manuel said. A four part series focusing on each of the major BIA activities in Denver will appear in the Department of the Interior's People, Land and Water publication.