

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL TRUSTEE FOR AMERICAN INDIANS

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Reform Efforts Improve Services for Indian Trust Beneficiaries Across Indian Country

Since the passage of the American Indian Trust Fund Management Reform Act of 1994, the Department of the Interior has undertaken efforts to improve all aspects of the management of the Indian Trust for future generations. According to Ross Swimmer, Special Trustee for American Indians, "Changes underway are greatly improving services for trust account holders throughout Indian Country. Interior employees, with substantial help from tribal leaders and Congress, have worked hard to create and now implement a comprehensive blueprint for Indian Trust reform."

For the first time in the history of the Indian Trust, beneficiaries have new services available to them including: a toll-free information call center, highly-experienced trust officers in the field who work directly with beneficiaries, an archival records facility, and new land surveyors to work with tribes on land issues throughout Indian Country.

Congressional appropriations have made it possible for Interior to accomplish many aspects of Indian Trust reform for beneficiaries including:

- For the first time in the history of the Indian Trust, account holders can call a nationwide toll-free information center to get answers to their questions. Employees at the Trust Beneficiary Call Center have answered more than 33,000 inquiries from beneficiaries this year. Before the Call Center opened, beneficiaries often had to contact a number of Interior offices—including the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Minerals Management Service—to get their questions answered. Because beneficiaries are getting answers through the Call Center, BIA and other Interior office staff members have been able to redirect more than 1,600 hours to other Indian program work.
- More than \$14.4 million has been distributed to individual Indian trust account holders who were previously on the "Whereabouts Unknown" list through collaborative efforts between the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST), BIA, and tribal governments. A number of the beneficiaries had more than \$50,000 in their accounts; a few had more than \$100,000. In the first half of this year 10,177 account holders whose whereabouts were previously unknown were located.
- Millions of Indian Trust records have been safeguarded and protected for future use at the American Indian Records Repository, in Lenexa, Kansas. So far, 119,665 boxes containing almost 250 million pages of Indian records have been electronically indexed and stored at a state-of-the-art storage facility. The new repository, housed near Haskell University on the Missouri River, is already more than half-full of stacks 14 boxes high.

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- To date, the equivalent of 153,965 acres of land has been returned to Indian reservations through the Indian Lands Consolidation Office (ILCO) purchase programs to stem fractionation. These programs use appropriated funds to purchase highly fractionated interests and return the land to the tribe, therefore helping to restoring economic viability to the region. So far, ILCO has purchased 162,589 fractionated interests, and is managing acquisition programs for 18 reservations within seven BIA regions.
- Tribal and individual trust beneficiaries now have OST Regional Trust Administrators and Fiduciary Trust Officers, experienced in fiduciary trust matters, available to them for all their trust needs. The new staff members are working at BIA and other offices throughout the country. This is the first time beneficiaries have had staff available to them that are specifically focused on trust asset assistance.
- Land survey issues in Indian Country are being managed by new BLM Indian Lands Surveyors, hired specifically to support Indian Country needs. In partnership, OST, BIA and BLM have hired the first six of twelve cadastral surveyors to work directly with tribes and individuals. This is the first time that surveyors will be stationed in BIA regional offices to work with Indian Trust beneficiaries.
- A new "lockbox" process has been implemented for the collection of trust payments. The new process (used by major financial institutions) has been introduced to the Concho and Anadarko pilot reform agencies in Oklahoma, and will greatly improve the efficiency of trust payment collections.
- Account holders with trust assets in the pilot agency locations will begin receiving comprehensive statements. The improved account statements will include detailed information on land ownership, including location, encumbrances, and income.

The Department of the Interior continues to implement these and other reforms for the management of trust assets developed by tribal leadership, Interior staff, and Congress. These examples are only a few of the changes underway. For information on reform efforts, and Interior's other Indian Trust efforts such as historical accounting, see the Fiduciary Trust Model and the 21st Quarterly Report to the Court at www.doi.gov/ost.