



NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL TRUSTEE FOR AMERICAN INDIANS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 2005

Contact: Maria Streshinsky
(202) 208-4289

The Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) Opens Nationwide Trust Beneficiary Call Center, toll-free (888) 678-6836 ext. 0

- *New OST Trust Beneficiary Call Center is a toll-free information center for all Indian Trust beneficiaries.*
- *During the first four-and-a-half months of pilot testing focused on the Concho and Anadarko agencies in Oklahoma, Call Center staff handled more than 18,000 phone calls from Indian Trust beneficiaries.*
- *More than 94% of all calls were resolved immediately, with staff providing answers to inquiries in a matter of minutes.*

Indian Trust beneficiaries now have a nationwide toll-free location to call for information on their trust account.

OST began the Trust Beneficiary Call Center service as a pilot-program in the Concho and Anadarko agencies in Oklahoma. By December of 2005, beneficiaries across the nation will have direct access to the Call Center, without even having to dial an extension.

During the first four-and-a-half months of operation, **Call Center staff members answered 18,908 calls** from Indian Trust account holders. The majority of calls were concerning specific account information, but many callers asked questions about other issues such as realty, mineral leases, and new probate laws. **Of these calls, 17,775 of the callers had their questions answered immediately.** In the past, callers may have contacted their local BIA office, where employees often had to spend many hours finding answers to inquiries. By contacting the Call Center, it is estimated that more than 963 hours were saved for Department of the Interior field staff to focus on other Indian trust-related issues.

According to Special Trustee Ross Swimmer, *"This is the first time Indian Trust beneficiaries have had a convenient, one-stop resource for trust asset information. In a matter of minutes, beneficiaries can now get answers to their questions. In the past it could take hours or days of telephone tag between Interior employees for people to get answers. The time saved by Interior field staff, who now can focus on their responsibilities to beneficiaries, is invaluable for Indian Country and is sure to translate into increased productivity."*

Call Center staff also help with other Indian Affairs projects, such as locating Indian trust account holders who do not have a current address on file, and whose whereabouts are unknown. Last year, one Call Center staff member was able to help identify a trust beneficiary whose whereabouts were previously unknown, and who had more than \$100,000 in an Indian Trust account.

The new Trust Beneficiary Call Center is just one of a number of trust reform efforts that Interior is undertaking to improve both services and information for Indian Trust beneficiaries across the country. Other projects include providing Direct Deposit of funds for account holders, creating a nationwide system for all trust data, establishing a secure "lock-box" procedure for collections, and updating trust asset title information. All of these projects fall under the umbrella of the Fiduciary Trust Model adopted by the Department of the Interior in 2004. For a copy of the model, see www.doi.gov/ost.

The Trust Beneficiary Call Center is open from Monday through Friday, 7:00 am to 5:00 pm, Mountain Time. Hours will be extended to evenings and weekends in coming months.