



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL TRUSTEE FOR AMERICAN INDIANS
Washington, D.C. 20240

May 19, 2008

Dear Tribal Leader:

In December, the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST) initiated a pilot program to offer the convenience and security of debit cards to Individual Indian Money (IIM) account holders. The pilot program has generated significant interest. By early April, over 900 IIM account holders had requested an enrollment form and approximately 500 debit cards had been issued to those who returned the forms. After the pilot ends in June, the program will be evaluated for improvements before it is implemented nationwide.

Although the pilot was launched in three states—Arizona, Oklahoma, and Washington—any IIM account holder may participate. If members of your tribe are interested, they can obtain more information by calling the Trust Beneficiary Call Center, toll free, at 1-888-678-6836 or by visiting www.doi.gov/ost, selecting the “What’s New” button, and then clicking the debit card link.

While the debit card is one of the newest trust reforms, the American Indian Records Repository (AIRR) recently experienced its fourth anniversary. It was with great pleasure that Principal Deputy Special Trustee Donna Erwin and I escorted two members of the Indian Land Working Group (ILWG) on a tour of AIRR. On Tuesday, April 29, 2008, Mr. Austin Nuñez, the ILWG chairman, and Ms. Marcella Giles, a board member, spent several hours walking through the facility and talking with us about concerns that affect records and other aspects of Indian trusts.

After the tour, both of our ILWG guests noted that the space exceeded their expectations. They were particularly pleased with the scientific approach to the preservation of records and with the professionalism of the staff. They were also reassured by the strict security throughout the facility.

As you know, the core committee of the ILWG includes landowners and Indian organizations who work to promote the restoration and preservation of tribal homelands. Chairman Nuñez, responding to a letter from OST to tribal organizations last fall that invited closer collaboration and exchange, requested a tour of AIRR. He felt the tour would help ILWG board members better understand how Indian records are being handled.

AIRR is an excellent facility. It holds more than 170,000 boxes of records, and that number is growing daily. Inactive trust records, those no longer needed for daily operations, are moved from government offices to be indexed and stored as permanent records in AIRR. The storage in Lenexa is operated in coordination with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) from which OST, in a unique partnership arrangement, rents space and services. However, it is important to note that the records are *owned* by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and OST.

The tour of the facility was conducted by three guides, one each from the Office of Trust Records (OTR), NARA, and the Office of Historical Trust Accounting (OHTA). Our OTR guide explained how they receive research requests from OST and BIA staff and are typically able to reply to those requests within 48 hours. The OHTA guide described the process being utilized for Historical Accounting. The guide from NARA took us through the climate-controlled storage, which is kept at approximately 60 degrees Fahrenheit and 50 percent humidity. In addition, the air in the storage area is exchanged and filtered continually to remove fine particulates.

If you are in the vicinity or available at some time in the future to participate in a personal tour of AIRR, please contact Mr. Frank Perniciaro at 505-816-1173. However, I also encourage you to take advantage of the expertise of OTR personnel, who are located in Albuquerque and at regional BIA offices. They are available to consult with you about professional records management and preservation. In fact, there is special secure space reserved for trust records that tribes would like to store and OTR staff can tell you about that service by calling the OTR Director at 505-816-1600.

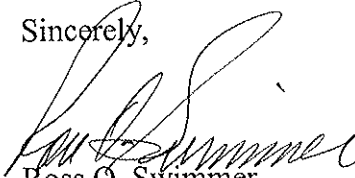
While on the tour, we also discussed the issue of fractionation. The week prior to our tour, I had attended the Intertribal Monitoring Association (ITMA) meeting where fractionation was a major topic of discussion. ITMA is leading the process to address solutions to fractionation and will be reaching out to ILWG, other organizations, and tribes for participation. My concern is that twenty years from now, most of the land will be so fractionated that it will be lose much of its productivity. I encourage you to become involved with the consultation process.

Of course, land issues bring to mind the related topic of surveys. The Bureau of Land Management recently produced a video about the Certified Federal Surveyor (CFedS) program. The video explains how these specially qualified private sector surveyors can help with your survey requirements. If you have not received a copy of the video, please contact the CFedS program manager, Ron Scherler, at 602-906-5568 or ron_scherler@blm.gov.

Lastly, we are all aware of the movement Judge Robertson has brought to the Cobell lawsuit. A trial is scheduled for June 9, 2008. The judge issued his pretrial order on May 2, 2008. Plaintiffs are to file their list of witnesses and the expected subjects of their testimony on May 16, 2008 and the government is to file by May 30, 2008. If a pretrial conference is requested, it will be held on June 2, 2008. The judge has stated he expects a dollar figure award to be the outcome of the trial.

With so many changes in the future, we need to keep our communications open. Please contact me if you have concerns or to share ideas for better management of Individual Indian Money or tribal financial trust assets.

Sincerely,



Ross O. Swimmer

Special Trustee for American Indians