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Western Regional Tribal Leaders Address Cobell Trust Land Consolidation Program with Federal Officials *Additional Consultation Meeting Set for the Great Plains Region*

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Department of Interior (DOI) Solicitor Hilary Tompkins, Associate Deputy Secretary Meghan Conklin, and Deputy Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs for Policy and Economic Development Jodi Gillette met with tribal officials in Phoenix, Ariz., today for the fifth of six scheduled regional government-to-government consultation meetings on the Trust Land Consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement. The meetings with tribal leaders are a part of the Obama Administration's commitment to re-invigorating nation-to-nation relationships with tribes.

In response to requests from tribal leaders, the Interior Department is making two additions to the consultation process for the Trust Land Consolidation Program under the Cobell Settlement. First, Interior will host a seventh regional tribal consultation session in the BIA Great Plains Region on October 26, 2011, in Rapid City, South Dakota. Second, the Department is extending the public comment period to November 1, 2011, in order to allow more time for written comments to be submitted.

"These consultation sessions are integral to the implementation of the Cobell Settlement," said Tompkins. "I am very interested in hearing from the tribal leadership on their concerns and issues relating to a satisfactory conclusion of this landmark case."

"The consultations are progressively moving forward towards ways of implementing the settlement," said Conklin. "Interior is pleased with the tribal input from these sessions and will continue to work closely with the tribes."

"The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs is pleased with the process and on-going consultations on this matter," said Gillette. "Consultations demonstrate this administration's commitment to continue its respect for tribal sovereignty."

Today's participants included leaders and representatives of a number of tribes from the Western Region and other Regions.

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On May 27, 2011, U.S. Senior District Judge Thomas F. Hogan granted communication between representatives of the United States and Cobell class members only in regards to the Trust Land Consolidation component of the Settlement.

BACKGROUND ON COBELL SETTLEMENT:

The \$3.4 billion Cobell settlement was approved by Congress on November 30, 2010 (Claims Resolution Act of 2010) and signed by President Obama on December 8, 2010. The Cobell Settlement will address the Federal Government's responsibility for an historical accounting of Individual Indian trust accounts and trust mismanagement claims on behalf of more than 300,000 individual Indians. A fund of \$1.5 billion will be used to compensate class members for their historical accounting, trust administration and asset mismanagement claims.

In addition, to address the continued proliferation of thousands of new trust accounts caused by the "fractionation" of land interests through succeeding generations, the Settlement establishes a \$1.9 billion fund for the voluntary buy-back and consolidation of fractionated land interests. The land consolidation program will provide individual American Indians with an opportunity to obtain cash payments for divided land interests and free up the land for the benefit of tribal communities. Up to \$60 million of the \$1.9 billion will be set aside to provide scholarships for post secondary higher education and vocational training for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The locations and dates for the remaining regional tribal consultations can be found at:
www.doi.gov/cobell.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs discharges the duties of the Secretary of the Interior with the authority and direct responsibility to strengthen the government-to-government relationship with the nation's 565 federally recognized tribes, advocate policies that support Indian self-determination, protect and preserve Indian trust assets, and administer a wide array of laws, regulations and functions relating to American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, tribal members and individual trust beneficiaries. The Assistant Secretary oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education. For more information, visit www.indianaffairs.gov.

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