Interior Sends Additional $1.2 Million in Purchase Offers to Nearly 600 Landowners with Fractional Interests at Makah Reservation

Offers Valid for 45 Days as Part of $1.9 Billion Land Buy-Back Program

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Department of the Interior today announced that the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations (Buy-Back Program) has sent additional purchase offers totaling approximately $1.2 million to nearly 600 individual landowners with fractional interests in parcels at the Makah Reservation in the state of Washington. These offers will provide landowners the opportunity to voluntarily sell their fractional interests, which would be consolidated and held in trust for the Makah Indian Tribe.

The Buy-Back Program implements the land consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement, which provided $1.9 billion to purchase fractional interests in trust or restricted land from willing sellers at fair market value. Individuals who choose to sell their interests will receive payments directly in their IIM accounts. Consolidated interests are immediately restored to tribal trust ownership for uses benefiting the reservation community and tribal members.

“Fractionation is a serious problem that locks away lands across Indian Country that tribal governments could be using for the benefit of their tribes,” said Kevin K. Washburn, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. “That’s why the success of the Buy-Back Program is vitally important to the future of tribal nations. We are encouraged by initial purchases, and will continue to work cooperatively with tribal governments to conduct outreach to landowners. Consolidating and returning these lands to tribes in trust has enormous potential to improve tribal community resources.”

In December 2013, the Program began making offers to individuals who own interests at the Makah, Pine Ridge, and Rosebud Reservations to ensure their lands stay in trust. Accepted offers have already resulted in payments to landowners totaling more than $30 million and the consolidation and restoration of nearly 87,000 acres to tribes. While payments vary considerably, numerous owners have received thousands of dollars, and a few have received more than
$100,000 for choosing to sell their interests. On average, payments to individuals have been made within seven days after Interior receives a complete, accepted offer package.

Purchase offers are valid for 45 calendar days. **Owners must accept and return current purchase offers for fractionated lands on Makah by May 30, 2014.** Once accepted offers are processed, the Program will move implementation efforts to other tribal locations.

For information about outreach events where landowners with interests at Makah can gather information in order to make informed decisions, contact Dale Denney at dale.denney@makah.com or 360-645-3106, or visit: facebook.com/FTOPugetSoundAgency and facebook.com/Makah.Tribe.

Landowners can contact their local Fiduciary Trust Officer or call the Trust Beneficiary Call Center at 888-678-6836 with questions about their purchase offers. More information is also available at: http://www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/landowners.

Sellers receive fair market value for their land, in addition to a base payment of $75 per offer, regardless of the value of the land. All sales will also trigger contributions to the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund. Up to $60 million will go to this fund to provide financial assistance through annual scholarships to American Indian and Alaska Native students wishing to pursue post-secondary education and training. These funds are in addition to purchase amounts paid to individual sellers, so contributions will not reduce the amount paid to landowners for their interests. More information about the Fund and how interested students can apply can be found at the American Indian College Fund website: www.collegefund.org/Cobell.

Interior holds about 56 million acres of land in trust or restricted status for American Indians. The Department holds this land in more than 200,000 tracts, of which about 93,500 – on nearly 150 reservations – contain fractional ownership interests available for purchase by the Buy-Back Program. There are more than 245,000 landowners, holding more than 3 million fractional interests in the tracts, eligible to participate in the Program.

A decision to sell land for restoration to tribes does not jeopardize a landowner’s ability to receive individual settlement payments from the Cobell Settlement, which are being handled by the Garden City Group.

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