



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

OCT - 3 2008

Dear Tribal Leader:

At the start of the summer, the Department of the Interior (DOI) completed drafting a compellation of the best practices among Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Regions for processing applications to bring land into trust for tribes or individuals. The BIA handbook on Acquisition of Title to Land held in Fee or Restricted Fee-to-Trust is the compellation. It can be found at www.doi.gov/bia/. Since the Handbook's completion, the BIA has been developing a plan to release the Handbook, as well as to begin the establishment of a standing forum for collaboration to further enhance the capacity of BIA's process to bring land into trust. These efforts will have an immediate impact on the efficiency of new applications, promote the land into trust process among Indian Country and its neighbors, and broaden the national understanding of trust land acquisitions.


Effective today all BIA staff will begin to use the Handbook as a guide to review new applications to take land into trust within or contiguous to reservation boundaries. The BIA's Office of Trust Services and DOI Solicitor's Office crafted the Handbook to operate within the existing regulations. Any Handbook conflict with the regulations must be read to conform to the regulations. While the Handbook's content reflects ongoing practices within BIA offices, the Office of Trust Services and Deputy Bureau Director Vicki Forrest can address any issues that require clarification.

March 2009 will mark the start of a first-of-its-kind annual forum for BIA staff, DOI solicitors, and tribal representatives. Our annual forum will be an opportunity for the Department and Indian Country to discuss the execution of the land into trust processes and to assess the need for working group meetings to craft future components of the Handbook. The BIA Office of Trust Services in conjunction with an Indian Country host will announce an exact date and location for the forum in the near future.

A key element of our March forum will be first-hand accounts from BIA staff, solicitors, and representatives from Indian Country on the Handbook's operation. Please use the coming months to identify areas that will benefit from discussion during the annual forums.

I want to join the former Assistant Secretary in thanking the many BIA staff and Solicitor's Office attorneys from the Central Office and Regional Offices for their efforts and contributions to the Handbook. The Handbook provides a tool to offer more efficient services for Indian County and promotes a greater national understanding of the responsibilities the BIA holds for strengthening tribal governance through the responsible acquisition of trust land.

Sincerely,


Acting Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs