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U.S. officials, Native American leaders to meet on returning lands

By Tyler Clifford

September 14, 2021 5:09 PM CDT · Updated 2 years ago



REUTERS/Gary Cameron

Sept 14 (Reuters) - Federal officials will meet with Native American tribes next month to gather recommendations as the federal government seeks to move ahead with efforts to protect and restore tribal homelands, the U.S. Department of the Interior said on Tuesday.

Tribal leaders will be asked for advice on several topics, including the process to take land back into trust, leasing and treaty rights, among other issues under the Biden administration's initiative to streamline steps allowing tribes to regain their land.

Federal land trust policies allow tribes to re-acquire historic land and aim to remedy practices going back more than a century that took away Native American tribes' lands across the present-day United States.

In recent years, tribes have faced delays and high costs to develop housing projects, manage law enforcement agencies, develop energy projects and other economic development activities because of a patchwork of landholdings within existing reservation boundaries.

"We have an obligation to work with Tribes to protect their lands and ensure that each community has a homeland where its citizens can live together to lead safe and fulfilling lives," Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland said. "These important actions are a step in the right direction to restore homelands that will strengthen Tribal communities."

The virtual sessions are scheduled for Oct. 18, 21, 25 and 26.

The department in April allowed regional Bureau of Indian Affairs directors to review and approve applications, a reversal of a Trump-era order that gave jurisdiction to the department's headquarters and triggered delays. [read more](#)

A department official said 560,000 acres of land were placed in trust for tribes during the Obama administration, followed by 75,000 acres of land under the Trump administration.

Interior Department Secretary Deb Haaland, a former U.S. representative from New Mexico, is the first Native American to lead a Cabinet agency. She oversees the U.S. government's relationship with nearly 600 federally recognized tribal nations as well as policies guiding use of 500 million acres of federal and tribal land, a fifth of the nation's surface.

Reporting by Tyler Clifford and Valerie Volcovici; Editing by Dan Grebler and Susan Heavey

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