



Agreement formalizes AIANTA's role in helping federal efforts under the NATIVE Act to strengthen tribal self-determination through cultural tourism and related economic development industries in Indian Country

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WASHINGTON - Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Tara Mac Lean Sweeney today signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Department of Commerce and the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) to formalize that group's role in strengthening collaboration and coordination related to travel and tourism on federal and tribal lands, in accordance with Public Law 114-221, the Native American Tourism Improving Visitor Experience Act, or NATIVE Act, of 2016.

The signing took place during AIANTA's 20th anniversary conference in Albuquerque, N.M., where Assistant Secretary Sweeney spoke at the event's morning session.

"I congratulate AIANTA on its 20th anniversary of helping bring the benefits of tourism to Indian Country," **Sweeney said**. "This MOU enters the Departments of Interior and Commerce and their respective bureaus and agencies into a collaborative partnership with AIANTA for the implementation of the NATIVE Act. I am honored to be here today, and pleased to sign this agreement creating a new partnership between AIANTA, Interior and Commerce whose goal is to develop and strengthen tourism's important role in sustaining tribally based economies."

"We are delighted to be working with the Department of the Interior and the Department of Commerce to formalize our long-standing relationships and strengthens our ability to enhance and grow tribal tourism," **said AIANTA Executive Director Camille Ferguson**. "The signing of this Memorandum of Understanding opens the door and removes barriers for future collaborations and outreach to tribes."

"The Department of Commerce remains committed to the economic development of Native American communities," **said Department of Commerce Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs Michael Platt**. "As more Americans and overseas travelers spend time in these communities, they will experience firsthand the wonder of landscapes and natural beauty, as well as learn about the rich heritage, history and cultures of Native Americans."

[AIANTA](#) is a nonprofit association of American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, Native Hawaiian organizations and tribal businesses dedicated to advancing Indian Country and Native Hawaiian tourism. It is a voice and resource for these communities who are, or seek to become, engaged in cultural tourism. It helps members develop, sustain and grow tourism destinations, in a manner that respects and honors Native traditions and values, through technical assistance as well as training and educational resources.

Congress enacted the NATIVE Act to enhance and integrate Native American tourism, empower Native American communities, increase coordination and collaboration between federal tourism assets, and expand heritage and cultural tourism opportunities in the United States. The purposes of the NATIVE Act are to:

- Enhance and integrate Native American tourism, empower Native American communities, and advance the National Tourism Strategy;
- Increase coordination and collaboration between federal tourism assets to support Native American tourism and bolster recreational travel and tourism;
- Expand heritage and cultural tourism opportunities in the United States to spur economic development, create jobs and increase tourism revenues;
- Enhance and improve self-determination and self-governance capabilities in the Native American community and promote greater self-sufficiency;
- Encourage Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and Native Hawaiian organizations to engage more fully in Native American tourism activities to increase visitation to rural and remote areas that are too difficult to access or are unknown to domestic travelers and international tourists;
- Provide grants, loans and technical assistance to Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and Native Hawaiian organizations that will spur important infrastructure development, increase tourism capacity, and elevate living standards in Native American communities; and
- Support the development of technologically innovative projects that will incorporate recreational travel and tourism information and data from federal assets to improve visitor experience.

Section 4(d) of the act requires the secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the secretary of Commerce, to enter into an agreement with an entity or organization with a demonstrated record in tribal communities of defining, introducing, developing, and sustaining American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian tourism and related activities in a manner that respects and honors their traditions and values. AIANTA is a leading expert on Indian Country travel and tourism and related tribally based economic development industries.

Since 1992, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Division of Transportation has been the point of contact for matters involving tourism in Indian Country as a response to federal highway legislation enacted in 1991. It helped start and fund AIANTA's establishment as a nonprofit tribal organization for coordination and outreach to the tribal tourism industry. AIANTA was incorporated in 2002 and achieved federal tax exempt status as a 501(c)(3) entity in 2009.

Because the NATIVE Act elevated the BIA's responsibility with respect to tribal tourism issues, the division is establishing a branch of tribal tourism with funding provided to implement the act's provisions.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs oversees the BIA, which is headed by a director who is responsible for managing day-to-day operations through four offices – Indian Services, Justice Services, Trust Services and Field Operations – that administer or fund tribally based infrastructure, transportation, law enforcement, justice, social services, tribal governance, natural and energy resources, and trust management programs for the nation's 573 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages through 12 regional offices and over 80 agencies.

Transportation is one of five divisions within the Office of Indian Services. The mission of the Division of Transportation is to provide for and assist tribes in the development of their capacity to plan, construct

and maintain safe and efficient transportation networks. For more information visit the [Division of Transportation's website](#).

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<https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/opa/online-press-release/assistant-secretary-sweeney-signs-mou-commerce-department-and>