



## Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - Interior Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Neal A. McCaleb today announced that the Joint DOI/Tribal Leaders Task Force will hold its next meeting on April 25- 26, 2002 in San Diego, Calif. The Task Force was established in February to review plans on improving the Department's management of individual Indian and tribal trust assets.

"The Joint DOI/Tribal Leaders Task Force is helping us find the best solutions to meet the challenge of trust reform," said McCaleb. "As their work progresses, I am confident the task force members, many of whom are elected tribal leaders, will give careful and deliberate thought as to how the Department's trust management system can be improved."

On November 15, 2001, Secretary Gale Norton announced her proposal to transfer and consolidate Indian trust asset management functions currently administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and other Interior agencies within a new Bureau of Indian Trust Assets Management (BITAM). She also announced the establishment of an Assistant Secretary for Indian Trust Assets Management to oversee BITAM and a new Office of Indian Trust Transition (OITT) to implement her transfer and consolidation plan. After holding an extensive series of consultation meetings with tribal leaders on her trust reform efforts, Secretary Norton formed the task force to review her proposal along with alternative plans submitted by tribes.

"Secretary Norton is committed to bringing meaningful improvement to the management of Indian trust assets," said Deputy Secretary J. Steven Griles. "The Joint DOI/Tribal Leaders Task Force will assist in this effort by seeking ideas from the tribes, who are themselves trust beneficiaries, on ways to effectively implement trust reform."

The task force is composed of, in addition to Deputy Secretary Griles and Assistant Secretary McCaleb, Associate Deputy Secretary James E. Cason; Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs Director David L. Bernhardt; Office of Communications Director Eric Ruff; the Special Trustee for American Indians Thomas J. Slonaker, Indian Trust Transition Director Ross O. Swimmer and Deputy Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Wayne R. Smith along with 24 tribal leaders (with 16 alternates) from the BIA's twelve regions. Co-chairing the task force are Griles, McCaleb, Tex Hall, Chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes of North Dakota and Sue Masten, Chairwoman of the Yurok Tribes of Indians of California.

The task force held its first meeting in Shepherdstown, W.Va., on February 1-4, 2002. A second meeting was held in Phoenix, Ariz., in March.

**Note to Editors:** *A 2-page list of task force members accompanies this release.*

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