

Department of the Interior

Departmental Manual

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Series: Intergovernmental Relations

Part 512: American Indian and Alaska Native Programs

Chapter 2: Departmental Responsibilities for Indian Trust Resources

Originating Office: Office of American Indian Trust

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2.1. **Purpose.** This Chapter establishes the policies, responsibilities, and procedures for operating on a government-to-government basis with federally recognized Indian tribes for the identification, conservation, and protection of American Indian and Alaska Native trust resources to ensure the fulfillment of the Federal Indian Trust Responsibility.

2.2. **Policy.** It is the policy of the Department of the Interior to recognize and fulfill its legal obligations to identify, protect, and conserve the trust resources of federally recognized Indian tribes and tribal members, and to consult with tribes on a government-to-government basis whenever plans or actions affect tribal trust resources, trust assets, or tribal health and safety.

2.3. **Responsibilities.**

A. **Heads of bureaus and offices** are responsible for identifying any impact of Departmental plans, projects, programs or activities on Indian trust resources. Department officials shall:

(1) Establish procedures to ensure that the activities of Departmental organizations impacting upon Indian trust resources are explicitly addressed in planning, decision, and operational documents;

(2) Ensure that bureaus and offices consult with the recognized tribal government whose trust resource, asset, or health and safety is potentially affected by the proposed action, plan, or activity;

(3) Remove procedural impediments to working directly and effectively with tribal governments;

(4) Provide drafts of all procedures or amendments to procedures developed pursuant to this Chapter to the Office of American Indian Trust for review and comment; and,

(5) Designate a senior staff member to serve as liaison between the bureau or office and the Office of American Indian Trust.

B. **Office of American Indian Trust** is responsible for ensuring compliance with the procedures and requirements under this Chapter. The Office of American Indian Trust will serve as the Department's liaison and initial point of contact on all matters arising under this Chapter. All procedures and amendments to procedures shall be submitted by Departmental bureaus and offices to the Office of American Indian Trust for review and comment. After such

review and comment, the procedures and amendments to procedures will be transmitted to the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs for final approval.

C. **Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs** is responsible for approving bureau and office procedures, or amendments thereto, developed pursuant to this Chapter.

2.4. **Procedures.**

A. **Reports.** As part of the planning process, each bureau and office must identify any potential effects on Indian trust resources. Any effect must be explicitly addressed in the planning/decision documents, including, but not limited to, Environmental Assessments, Environmental Impact Statements, and/or Management Plans prepared for the project or activity. The documentation shall:

- (1) Clearly state the rationale for the recommended decision; and
- (2) Explain how the decision will be consistent with the Department's trust responsibility.

B. **Consultation.** In the event an evaluation reveals any impacts on Indian trust resources, trust assets, or tribal health and safety, bureaus and offices must consult with the affected recognized tribal government(s), the appropriate office(s) of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Office of the Solicitor, and the Office of American Indian Trust. Each bureau and office within the Department shall be open and candid with tribal government(s) during consultations so that the affected tribe(s) may fully evaluate the potential impact of the proposal on trust resources and the affected bureau(s) or office(s), as trustee, may fully incorporate tribal views in its decision-making processes. These consultations, whether initiated by the tribe or the Department, shall be respectful of tribal sovereignty. Information received shall be deemed confidential, unless otherwise provided by applicable law, regulations, or Administration policy, if disclosure would negatively impact upon a trust resource or compromise the trustee's legal position in anticipation of or during administrative proceedings or litigation on behalf of tribal government(s).

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