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CONTACT: Nedra Darling
202-219-4152

Assistant Secretary Washburn Issues Decision on Gaming Application for Kaw Nation of Oklahoma

Washington, D.C. – Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn today issued a decision to acquire a 21-acre parcel of land in Kay County, Oklahoma, in trust for the Kaw Nation of Oklahoma (Nation) for gaming purposes. The Tribe plans to construct and operate a small casino facility on the site, which also hosts the Tribe's travel plaza that provides refueling to interstate traffic and will continue to operate on the site.

"The Kaw Project will provide significant opportunities for economic development for the Kaw Nation, and will provide a means for the Tribe to improve the governmental services it provides to its members," Washburn said. "The acquisition of the site in trust is necessary to support these efforts."

Section 465 of the Indian Reorganization Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to acquire land in trust for Indian tribes. On May 17, 2013, Assistant Secretary Washburn issued a positive Secretarial Determination on the Nation's proposed gaming facility pursuant to the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act that found that a gaming facility on the site would be in the best interest of the Kaw Nation and its members and would not be detrimental to the surrounding community. On May 23, 2013, Governor Mary Fallin of Oklahoma concurred in this determination. In addition to the State, the Town of Braman, and Kay County strongly support the acquisition of the site into trust status.

In 1825, the Kaw Nation ceded over 18 million acres of land in Kansas. The Tribe was removed to Oklahoma in 1872 where it bought land for a reservation that was carved out of the existing Osage reservation. In the 1970s the Kaw reservation was flooded by the Army Corps of Engineers for the creation of the Kaw Dam and Reservoir on the Arkansas River. As a result, the Kaw Nation no longer has land on its former reservation. This fact distinguishes the Kaw Nation from other tribes in Oklahoma.

After its removal to Oklahoma, the Nation made its home in Kay County. The site is only 21 miles from the boundaries of the Tribe's former reservation, and is near the Nation's key governmental sites and population center at Newkirk. "The Kaw Nation has strong ties to the region," Washburn said. "The Nation seeks to restore a tribal land base in a region it has historically inhabited."

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs has responsibility for fulfilling the Interior Department's trust responsibilities and promoting self-determination on behalf of the 566 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments. The Assistant Secretary also oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education as well as the Office of Indian Gaming, which is responsible for implementing gaming-related activities assigned to Indian Affairs under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and other Federal laws.

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