



NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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NNHRC learns of U.S. Department of Interior's sacred sites listening sessions

SAINT MICHAELS, Navajo Nation— Today, the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission requested a letter from the U.S. Department of Interior regarding the upcoming sacred sites listening session scheduled for the month of August.

According to U.S. Department of Interior Counselor to the Assistant Secretary Dion Killsback, a press release will be issued soon.

Soon, however, may not be soon enough.

Because the Interior's listening sessions begin in approximately two weeks, NNHRC wants to ensure the public is aware of the listening sessions.

According to a letter from the U.S. Department of Interior Acting Assistant Secretary Donald E. Laverdure, the dates, times and locations are as follows:

- August 13, 2012 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the BIA Southwest Regional Office, Pete V. Domenici Bldg., 1001 Indian School Road in Albuquerque, New Mex. Contact: (505) 563-3103.
- August 16, 2012 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., at the Holiday Inn-Grand Montana Billings, 5500 Midland Road in Billings, Mont. Contact: (406) 248-7701.
- August 23, 2012, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Mystic Lake Casino Hotel, 2400 Mystic Lake Blvd., in Prior Lake, Minn. Contact: (952) 445-9000.
- August 24, 2012, from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m., at the Mohegan Sun Casino, 1 Mohegan Sun Blvd., in Uncasville, Conn. Contact: (860) 862-7311.
- (Tentative) August 28, 2012, a time, location to be determined for the Portland, Ore., area.

The Interior's sacred sites listening sessions should not be confused with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's sacred sites listening sessions, which took place last year.

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United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

JUL 27 2012

Dear Tribal Leader:

The Obama Administration recognizes that the protection of sacred sites on Federal lands is necessary for the survival of traditional religious practices, cultures, and ways-of-life. These sacred sites are integral to tribal identities and emblematic of sovereign tribal nations. To address tribal concerns regarding sacred sites issues, it is important for the Department of the Interior (Department) to seek additional tribal knowledge on sacred sites in general as well as knowledge relating to specific sites as appropriate within its surrounding areas. The Department will be better equipped to make decisions that are sensitive to the ceremonial use and physical integrity of sacred sites through the benefit of tribal input and views on such matters.

The Department will conduct listening sessions with tribes regarding tribal issues of concern with respect to sacred sites located on Federal lands. We invite recognized leaders of tribal governments and, if a tribe so elects, extend the invitation to designated spiritual leaders granted authority by the recognized tribal leadership to participate as tribal officials. These sacred site listening sessions are intended to assist in developing policies that result in effective, comprehensive, and long lasting Federal protection of, and tribal access to, these places that are so important to the fabric and culture of tribal nations. Tribal leaders have worked very hard with the Department in the past for which we acknowledge their tireless efforts and hard work. For many years the Department has received input on sacred sites and to that end, the Department is seeking input specific, but not limited to, the following topics regarding sacred sites:

- Meanings of sacred sites and whether the Department should attempt to define the term "sacred site";
- Personal views of existing Departmental practices or policies, if any, that should be revised to protect sacred sites and steps necessary to make appropriate revisions;
- Potential development of Departmental practices or policies to protect sacred sites;
- How the Department should facilitate tribal access to sacred sites;
- How the Department should control and grant access to tribally provided information regarding sacred sites;
- Whom the Department should include (recognized leaders of tribal government, tribal spiritual leaders, et.al.) in determining whether a site is considered "sacred" by a tribe.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs will conduct the sacred sites listening sessions at the following dates and times:

August 13, 2012

Sacred Sites Session, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
BIA Southwest Regional Office
Pete V. Domenici Building
1001 Indian School Road
Albuquerque, NM 87104
(505) 563-3103

August 16, 2012

Sacred Sites Session, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Holiday Inn-Grand Montana Billings
5500 Midland Road
Billings, MT 59101
(406) 248-7701

August 23, 2012

Sacred Sites Session, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
Mystic Lake Casino Hotel
2400 Mystic Lake Boulevard
Prior Lake, MN 55372
(952) 445-9000

August 24, 2012

Sacred Sites Session, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Mohegan Sun Casino
1 Mohegan Sun Boulevard
Uncasville, CT 06382
(860) 862-7311

At this time, we are looking into the possibility of scheduling one additional sacred sites listening sessions to be held in Portland, Oregon on August 28, 2012, with a location to be determined.

The Department understands that many Indian tribes have belief systems that discourage or even prohibit the disclosure of the location or other information about sacred sites and places. The Department will respect tribal requests that information about such locations be kept confidential and only share this information with appropriate agency personnel. To the full extent permissible under the law, this Notice is not intended to create any right, benefit, or trust responsibility, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law by a party against the Department or any person. The Department also does not waive by virtue of this announcement any applicable privilege that it may hold.

If you are unable to attend any of these listening sessions, please send your input/suggestions by September 21, 2012, via email to consultation@bia.gov or the U.S. Department of the Interior, attn.: Mr. Dion KILLSBACK, Counselor to the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, 1849 C Street, NW, MS 4141-MIB, Washington, DC 20240. Should you have additional questions, Mr. KILLSBACK can be reached at (202) 208-6939.

Sincerely,



Donald E. Laverdure
Acting Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs