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NSN questions advisor on Lower Brule Land Buy-Back Program

By Ernestine Chasing Hawk

Native Sun News Editor



KEVIN WRIGHTLOWER BRULE — According to Katherin Grounds, Senior Advisor on Tribal Relations for the Land Buy-Back Program, landowners with fractionated interests at Lower Brule will receive their offers in 2016.

“Offers are tentatively scheduled to be mailed to eligible landowners with fractionated interests at the Lower Brule Reservation in 2016,” Grounds wrote in an email.

Kevin Wright, acting chairman for the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe had posted on his Facebook page last month that “At the Aug. 5, 2015 council session we were notified that we missed a deadline for the Indian Buy Back program.”

Grounds who was at that meeting responded via email, “The Land Buy-Back Program (Buy-Back Program or Program) was created to implement the land consolidation component of the Cobell Settlement, which provided \$1.9 billion to consolidate fractional land interests across Indian Country. The Program is authorized for a ten-year period, through November 2022. There are approximately 245,000 owners of nearly three million fractional interests across Indian Country who are eligible to participate in the Buy-Back Program.

In its 2014 Status Report, the Buy-Back Program announced 42 locations where implementation activities would begin through the middle of 2017, which included Lower Brule Reservation. Through the Buy-Back Program, fractionated interests on Lower Brule Reservation will be purchased from willing sellers at fair market value. These purchased interests will then immediately be held in trust for the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. The Program is working cooperatively with Lower Brule Council leadership and staff to implement land consolidation activities. To date, mapping, mineral evaluation, and appraisal work for the Lower Brule Reservation have begun.”

NSN: Can you give an explanation for the delay in offers from OST for land on Lower Brule?

Grounds: There is no delay at Lower Brule. There are four land consolidation phases to the Land Buy-Back Program: outreach, land research, valuation and acquisition. The Program is currently engaged in outreach, land research and valuation activities at Lower Brule Reservation. The Program is on schedule to begin the final phase (acquisition) in 2016. At that time, offers will be sent to eligible landowners with interests at the Lower Brule Reservation. Interested landowners do not need to wait until they receive an offer to get more information. They are encouraged to contact the Trust Beneficiary Call Center (TBCC) at (888) 678-6836 for answers to their questions and to sign up as a willing seller.

NSN: There was an issue with who the contact people for Lower Brule, has that been resolved?

Grounds: The Buy-Back Program communicates with the Tribal Council. The Tribe plans to identify a point of contact through their Memorandum of Agreement.

NSN: What were the issues about how the former chairman proposed to use the money for the buyback program?

Grounds: The Department has entered into agreements with 20 sovereign tribal nations thus far to cooperatively implement the Buy-Back Program. Each agreement is unique in time, scope and responsibilities based on the expressed interests of the tribe. The agreements outline coordinated strategies to facilitate education about the Buy-Back Program and reach out to owners with fractionated interests in reservation land.

The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and the Buy-Back Program are working toward finalizing a memorandum of agreement. The Agreement provides for the Program to be responsible for all phases of the land consolidation process. The Agreement also provides for continued consultation and collaboration with the Tribe, including training interested tribal staff on landowner outreach.

NSN: Will tribal members get offers for their fractionated interests on Lower Brule?

If so when will the offers be mailed to tribal members?

Grounds: Offers are tentatively scheduled to be mailed to eligible landowners with fractionated interests at the Lower Brule Reservation in 2016. We encourage any landowners who are interested in learning more to contact the TBCC at (888) 678-6836 to confirm their interest and contact information. While landowners who do not register as willing sellers may still receive an offer, contacting the TBCC is the best way to ensure that the Program is aware of their interest in receiving and considering an offer. Registration in no way commits a landowner to sell their land and is no guarantee that they will receive an offer; it merely identifies the landowner's interest in receiving an offer and improves the Program's ability to communicate with landowners about their land.

(You can reach Ernestine Chasing Hawk at editor@nsweekly.com)

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