News Release

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Secretary Salazar and Associate Attorney General Perrelli Applaud Final Approval of Cobell Settlement

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, the Departments of Interior and Justice applauded the final approval by U.S. Senior District Judge Thomas F. Hogan of the settlement of *Cobell v. Salazar*, a long-running and contentious individual American Indian trust class-action lawsuit. The court's approval of the $3.4 billion settlement paves the way for payments to be made to as many as a half-million individual American Indians who had Individual Indian Money accounts or an interest in trust or restricted land managed by the Department of the Interior. The suit has been pending for 15 years.

Reaching a final settlement of *Cobell* has been a priority of the Obama administration.

"Judge Hogan's decision is another milestone in empowerment and reconciliation for the American Indians," Secretary Salazar said, noting in particular the contributions of Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes and Interior's Solicitor Hilary Tompkins in reaching the settlement. "The Cobell settlement not only resolves the contentious 15-year litigation, but also honorably and responsibly turns the page on an unfortunate chapter in the Department's history, demonstrating President Obama's commitment to reconciliation and empowerment for American Indian nations."

"The judge's finding that the settlement is fair and reasonable is a major milestone in the Administration's effort to reach a resolution of litigation that has cast a cloud over the government's relationship with American Indians," said Associate Attorney General Tom Perrelli, who has twice testified before Congress on the settlement.

"The Cobell settlement is the beginning of true trust reform," said Interior Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes, noting that Interior is establishing a Secretarial Commission on Indian Trust Administration and Reform. The commission will undertake a forward-looking, comprehensive evaluation of how the Interior Department manages and administers its trust responsibilities. "Interior needs to be more transparent and customer-friendly," said Hayes. "The status quo is not acceptable."

Following an earlier ruling by Judge Hogan, Hayes began scheduling consultation meetings with tribal leaders to begin discussions on the land consolidation component of the settlement.

Interior Department officials will hold six regional government-to-government tribal consultations which will provide valuable input in developing an implementation strategy that will benefit tribal communities and help free up trust lands. The consultation process is fundamental to respecting the government-to-government relationship with the tribes.

Additional information is available at www.cobellsettlement.com and the Office of Special Trustee website at www.doi.gov/ost. More information on the Cobell settlement, including resources for Indian Trust Beneficiaries, is available at http://www.doi.gov/ost/cobell/index.html or http://www.indiantrust.com/index

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