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### **Northern Arapaho Files Suit to Protect Sovereignty**

The Northern Arapaho Tribe filed suit in Montana Federal District Court today to stop what the Tribe says are violations of its right to self govern and its right to manage federal programs designed for the benefit of Arapaho tribal members. The lawsuit names as defendants officials of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Chairman and Co-Chairman of the Shoshone Business Council for allowing or taking actions on behalf of the Northern Arapaho without the Tribe's consent.

The Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone are two separate tribes that own much of the same land base on the Wind River Reservation. Each Tribe has always had its own form of government and separately elects its own Business Council and other leaders.

According to the federal complaint, the Tribes managed a handful of shared tribal programs through a joint council that was dissolved in 2014. Since then, the Councils have made management decisions cooperatively. "Now, the Shoshone Council claims the joint council is back and that the Shoshone Council runs it on behalf of both Tribes, without the Arapaho. We're discovering that this so-called 'joint' council has approved mineral leases, employment in our shared tribal programs, and other things without our knowledge or approval. This has to stop," said Northern Arapaho Business Council Co-Chairman Ronald K. Oldman.

"The old JBC system was a mess. We needed to find new ways to cooperate with the Shoshone Council on a handful of programs that we share," said Northern Arapaho Business Council member Norman Willow, Sr. "We're still willing to cooperate when we can, but the idea that only one council -- the Shoshone Council -- can form a joint council is ridiculous," he added.

"We still think mediation is the best way to resolve things, but one Tribe can't run programs for another without its consent. That's a problem we have with the BIA, too, which is approving contracts with the defunct JBC. The BIA is encouraging the Shoshone Council to take actions on shared programs, over our objections," said Northern Arapaho Business Council Chairman Dean Goggles.

The BIA has three basic choices when approving federal contracts, according to the complaint. It may approve a contract with both Tribes, if they agree; or, it may divide funds and contract with each Tribe separately; or it can provide federal services directly to tribal members. "The BIA took none of these options," said Council member Darrell O'Neal. "Instead, the BIA contracted only with the Shoshone Council to run shared programs for both Tribes, without our consent," he added.