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Buy-Back Program sends offers to landowners with fractional interests at the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation

With program nearing conclusion, interested sellers have until August 12 to respond

WASHINGTON – The Department of the Interior today announced that 2,184 landowners with fractional interests at the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana have been sent more than \$11.1 million in purchase offers from the Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations.

Landowners who received offers with a cover letter date of June 28, 2022, have until August 12, 2022, to consider and return accepted offers.

The Land Buy-Back Program implements the land consolidation component of the *Cobell* Settlement, which provided \$1.9 billion to consolidate fractional interests in trust or restricted land within a 10-year period ending November 2022. The Program will continue to purchase fractional interests while winding down its operations.

“The Department is excited to be consolidating land again through the Land Buy-Back Program at the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. The Department recognizes the immense value that Tribal involvement and advocacy brings to our mutual land consolidation efforts,” said **Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Bryan Newland**. “We appreciate the continued collaboration with the Fort Belknap Indian Community to ensure that landowners are aware of this unique opportunity and understand their options and the resources available to make an informed decision.”

Interests consolidated through the Program are immediately restored to Tribal trust ownership. Program purchases can unify reservation lands for Tribal benefit and use, such as economic development, infrastructure, housing, cultural preservation and rights-of-way.

As of July 26, 2022, just \$7.6 million remains in the Trust Land Consolidation Fund, comprised of \$3.6 million in the land purchase portion of the Fund and \$4.0 million in the implementation portion of the Fund. Approval and payment of returned offers will be dependent on whether sufficient funds are left to honor them. The Program is collaborating with Tribes to prioritize the use of the remaining funds to best meet Tribal goals.

Landowners who respond before the deadline will be given equal consideration to allow landowners to make an informed decision without feeling rushed to be first in line. If a landowner wishes to participate in the Program, they still must return their offer by the date indicated in their offer package. Landowners submitting offers should refrain from making financial or other related decisions until they receive an acknowledgement notice confirming or declining the sale of their fractional interest(s).

Various informational tools are available to landowners, who are encouraged to think strategically about their options and carefully consider how to use the funds they receive from selling their land. For example, the Program's website includes:

- detailed frequently asked questions, available at <https://www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/faq>, and
- additional information to help individuals make informed decisions about their land, available at <https://www.doi.gov/buybackprogram/informeddecisionmaking>.

Landowners may contact the Trust Beneficiary Call Center at **888-678-6836** or TBCCmail@btfa.gov with questions about their land and/or purchase offers, or to request a copy of an appraisal report for any appraised tract in which they have an owner interest. Landowners may also contact their local Bureau of Trust Funds Administration office with additional questions.

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